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PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 32, No. 6. Whole No. 181, DEC., 1958. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc. (formerly Mercury Publications, Inc.) at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $4.50 in the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 527 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 527 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Second-class mail privileges authorized at Concord, N. H. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879. *© 1958 by Davis Publications, Inc. (formerly Mercury Publications, Inc.). All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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a new story by

AUTHOR: **HUGH PENTECOST**

TITLE: ***The Man With Half a Face***

TYPE: Suspense-Detective Novelette

LOCALE: Lakeview, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Anonymous letters threaten Jane Wardman, widow, schoolteacher, and mother of a 11-year-old boy, with a fate that is truly worse than death. Is there a crime more despicable, more vicious, than slander?*

ONE OF THE FRESHMAN GIRL STUdents brought the note to Jane Wardman in her classroom during the first period after lunch. It was unusual for Mr. Danning to summon a teacher to his office during a class period, but Jane had an idea what it was about, and she made a wry face as she folded the note and put it in the top drawer of her desk. Ten to one the parents of the Mangan boy had descended on the principal, outraged by the special report Jane had made on the young man. Parents were pretty much alike when it came to this sort of thing: they would talk righteously about the proper discipline for other people's children, but let their own be attacked in any way and they will fight tooth and nail. Jane's report on Pat Mangan had been unlikely to make his parents happy. He was old for a high school senior—past nineteen. He viewed the other students as children. He could not be controlled. He would not even pretend a common courtesy to members of the faculty. And he was, Jane suspected, the leader of a gang of boys in the community guilty of vandalism and worse. She had recommended turning Pat over to the courts. Since he was past the age limit for Juvenile Court jurisdic-

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tion, the recommendation was severe. Well, she would face the indignant parents if she must.

Jane announced to the class that she might not return for the balance of the period, gave them a theme to write, and placed the room in charge of two of the senior monitors. As she walked down the aisle toward the door at the rear of the room, she was aware of a couple of dozen heads turning to watch her. There was something peculiar abut those turned heads, a knowingness, the quality of a shared secret. She couldn't put her finger on it, but it made her curiously uncomfortable. It reminded her that the lunch period had been odd. She had carried her tray in the cafeteria to her usual table to join her usual group of teachers. Perhaps she had imagined it, but there seemed to have been an uneasy tension among them. There had certainly been no imagination about the way Agnes Foyle had risen and carried her tray to another place without speaking. Jane meant to corner Agnes after school to find out what she had been so upset about.

Jane Wardman had been on the faculty at the Regional High School for six years. Lakeview was not her home town, but her husband Bill had been born here, the remnants of his family still lived here, and since Jane had no family of her own it had seemed the logical place for her son Terry to grow up in. People in Lakeview remembered Bill with warmth and admiration. A war hero who had eventually died of war wounds. It was right for Terry to grow up where people still spoke highly of his father. It was tough enough for a boy to grow up without a father. Jane wanted Terry to remember Bill, to remember that Bill had loved him, that he had been a father to be proud of. And so far it had worked out well. She and Terry lived in a little cottage in the center of town that she got at a generously low rental from Judge Daley, who had been Bill's lawyer. Terry went to the grade school in town. She felt a deep warmth as she thought of Terry. He was a wonderful kid, a boy who would have made Bill very happy.

Miss Wilson, Mr. Danning's secretary, sat in the reception room outside the principal's office, pounding away at her typewriter, when Jane came in. Jane and Doris Wilson were good friends. Doris was plain and beau-less. Jane, who was extraordinarily pretty, was beauless for quite different reasons. Perhaps it was wrong, but after six years she could not shake off the feeling of one-ness with Bill. An attractive widow seems to be fair game for all the men in the community who are on the make. After going out on a few dates, Jane had abandoned that as a way of trying to make over her life. It just didn't work. So Jane and Doris Wilson

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had spent a lot of time together. Doris was in and out of the house like a member of the family. They often went to the movies. In one holiday period Doris had stayed with Terry while Jane went on a trip to New York.

"Hi!" Jane said.

Doris looked up from her typewriter and Jane was shocked. Doris's face was gray and looked as if it had been carved out of granite. "Mr. Danning's waiting for you," she said, and went immediately back to her typing.

Jane hesitated. There was something wrong here—very wrong. Then she thought of Pat Mangan's parents and the undoubted row they had made. Doris hated rows. Jane opened the door to the principal's office and went in.

She was surprised not to see the irate Mangans in the office. Paul Danning stood by the windows looking down at the athletic field. Paul Danning, in his mid-thirties, was a good principal. He had been one of Jane's few dates with a serious purpose. He had wanted to marry her, and if marriage had been possible for Jane in her frame of mind, he'd undoubtedly have made a good husband and a good father for Terry. She had had to say "No," however, and Paul Danning had accepted it gracefully. Their relationship as teacher and principal had continued to be friendly and successful.

Paul Danning turned from the windows and Jane saw at once that he was deeply troubled. He was tall, stoop-shouldered, with dark hair beginning to thin at the temples. He had little crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes which usually twinkled with a kind of permanent good humor. He only glanced at her now, but there was something in his eyes she had never seen there before—a kind of stunned disbelief.

"Sit down, Jane," he said.

She took the chair opposite him and gave him a cheerful grin. "It can't be as bad as all that, Paul," she said. "I suppose it's about the Mangan boy. Well, at least his parents didn't break up your furniture."

"It's not exactly the Mangan boy," he said. "Not the way you mean it."

"Oh?"

He swiveled his chair around so that he wasn't looking at her. He drew a deep, unhappy breath. "Jane, I'm going to have to ask for your resignation from the faculty."

She just stared at him.

"You can give any excuse you like. Ill health—the need to move Terry to a better school than the grade school here—anything you like."

This was no joke. She felt the muscles in her stomach tighten intolerably.

"There has been a special meeting of the Board of Education this

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morning," Paul Danning went on. "They don't want to make a scandal about it. They're willing to let you go as gracefully as possible."

"Now just a minute, Paul!" she said. "You asked for a report on the Mangan boy. I gave you an honest one. It didn't have to be made public. The Board doesn't have to act on it. I did my job as you asked me to, and—"

"Stop it!" he said sharply. He turned toward her for an instant. "Are you trying to tell me that you really don't know what this is all about?"

"If it isn't Pat Mangan—"

"It is Pat Mangan—in a way," he said. "And others."

"I think," she said very quietly, "you'd better stop beating around the bush."

"I'd rather cut off my right arm than have to go into this with you," he said. "Especially you. I hoped you'd simply accept the fact that the game was up and—and go, quietly. But if you insist on it, chapter and verse—"

"I insist, Paul, because I don't know what you're talking about."

He swung around to his desk, and his mouth was a thin, straight line. "Very well," he said, handing her a sheet of white paper on which something had been typed. "Chapter One. This is a copy of the original, of course."

She started to read, rapidly at first, then slowly and with a mounting horror. It was a letter addressed to Judge Daley, the Board of Education chairman. After she had read a few lines she glanced toward the bottom for a signature. There was none.

"Anonymous?" she asked.

Paul Danning nodded.

It was utterly incredible—incredible and vile. It suggested that she had made her report on the Mangan boy because she was amorously interested in him, and when he had turned her down because she was too old and because he was shocked that a teacher should approach him with immoral suggestions, she had retaliated with her untrue report. It went on to say that the Mangan boy wasn't the only one. It demanded that the Board of Education take action immediately.

Jane wanted to laugh, but she couldn't. Her throat muscles were so tight she couldn't even speak. She noticed the copy had been made on Doris Wilson's electric machine. That explained Doris. It explained the lunch period in the cafeteria. Agnes Foyle and other teachers must have been called in and questioned. It explained the turning of heads in her own classroom.

"That is not the only letter," Paul Danning said. "There are others, describing specific incidents and specific people involved in those incidents."

Jane's mouth and throat were as

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dry as cotton. "You believe this, Paul?"

He swung angrily away in his chair. "No!" he said. "I've been fighting it for a week, Jane. But—but—"

"But the Board has overruled you. Why wasn't I called in and given a chance to answer these charges? What kind of kangaroo court has been held here, Paul?"

"It's not that," he said miserably. "It's a question of how public you want to make it."

"Public! Doris typed this. That explains her stone face. I realize now why I was openly snubbed in the cafeteria at lunch time. Why, the kids in my own classroom already know. How much more public can you get?"

"The gossip can't be stopped," he said. "But if you accept the impossibility of the situation and resign, it will stay out of the newspapers of the county and out of the courts. If you insist on a public hearing, it's something that you can never live down or forget."

"And will 'anonymous' testify against me at a hearing?" she asked bitterly.

"Pat Mangan will. He has already testified to the Board."

"That rat!" Jane said. "That lying rat!" She pulled herself together. "And these other—gentlemen?"

"No one else has been called," he said. "If we start calling everyone named this town'll be rocked by a scandal it would never recover from. The Board hopes—"

"Damn the Board!" Jane said. "I have a right to be heard. I have a right to face my accusers—if they really exist." Then curiosity became too much for her. "And my friends on the faculty—did they support young Mr. Mangan?"

He twisted in his chair, unhappily. "They say," and there was irony in his voice, "they would never have dreamed such a thing possible. They say they thought of you as a person of the highest moral character. But—"

"But what?"

"In the light of the charges—" and he spoke as if he were quoting, "—in the light of the charges there were little things, looked at in that light—" He spread his hands helplessly.

She was silent for a moment. "Of course I'm going to fight," she said. "You can't fire me. The Teacher's Union won't let you fire me without an open hearing. The State law won't let you fire me without such a hearing."

Paul Danning was looking out the window again. "There's Terry," he said.

This jolted her down to her heels. She opened her mouth to speak, then closed it. Terry, sitting in his classroom over at the grade school—with some of the kids already knowing—

"If you resign," Paul Danning said, "you and Terry can leave

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Lakeview without any open publicity. You can go somewhere else and live untouched by this. If you fight, every newspaper in the county and state will have you spread over their front pages. You'll never be able to live anywhere again without this thing dogging you. Nor will Terry. What is he—eleven? And Jane, even if you were to win in court, after all the mud has been thrown you can't keep on living in this community."

"The scarlet letter!" she said. She thought she was going to laugh but a strangled little sob came out instead.

Paul Danning suddenly stood up and faced her. "If it wasn't for the boy, I'd say fight. But if there *is* anything—"

"You mean something in my lurid past that would substantiate this libel?" she asked, her chin up again. "Like the time you kissed me, Paul, after I'd refused to marry you? Like the time George Humphrey tried to stage a wrestling match with me in the front seat of his car after I'd made the mistake of going to the movies with him? Like that, Paul?"

"Like that," he said, unhappily. "Now look, I don't want to advise you. I ask you to think of Terry. The situation is a little complex."

"A little!"

"Judge Daley is your lawyer, isn't he? He handled Bill's estate, as I recall. But he's also chairman of the Board. All the same, I suggest that you go to him. He's your friend. He tried every way he knew to break down the evidence."

She remembered almost the last thing Bill had said as he lay dying in the hospital. "You can trust Ed Daley with your life, Jane. He's a good, loyal friend."

"Talk to Daley," Paul urged. "Take a couple of days off. We'll call it sick leave. Then make up your mind. Particularly on Terry's account I think you should resign and go quietly away. But if you decide to fight—" He drew a deep breath. "If you decide to fight I'll go along with you, if it costs me my job."

That was almost too much for her. She got up quickly from her chair. "Thanks for saying it, anyway, Paul," she said with a false crispness. "I don't suppose you want me to finish out the afternoon with my classes? The danger of contamination would be—"

"Please, Jane!"

She walked out into the reception room. Doris glanced up, a stricken look in her eyes. Anger boiled in Jane.

"I'll have the custodian send you a couple of bottles of disinfectant," she said. "Your little sanctum will need fumigating after my presence here."

"Oh, Jane!" Doris wailed, and was suddenly doubled over her typewriter, dissolved in tears.

Jane took a step toward her, the anger gone. "I'm sorry, Doris. I

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guess I'm a little on edge. I didn't mean to be a heel." She put her hand on Doris's shoulder.

Doris jerked away as though Jane's fingers had burned her. "Don't touch me!" she cried. "Don't touch me!"

Jane stared at her, horrified.

Ed Daley had grown up in Lakeview, gone to the grade school and the Regional High, to the State University and Law School. He was strictly a local product, who knew everything and all about everyone who had lived in Lakeview in his time and his father's. Ed was fiftyish, plump, jovial, and with a pair of the shrewdest blue eyes Jane Wardman could ever remember seeing. Ed's father had been the lawyer for Bill's family, and Ed had taken over when the old man died. The elder Daley had been a Judge before he died and Ed had followed in his shoes. Jane trusted Ed Daley but she didn't particularly like him. He was, she thought, too consciously a "character"; his jokes were too corny; his fatherly attitude toward her was a little hard to accept. But today she went to him eagerly.

"I know it's a difficult position for you, Ed," she said. "As chairman of the Board of Education you have responsibilities to the whole community. But you're my lawyer; you're trustee of Bill's estate. You have responsibilities to me, too."

The shrewd blue eyes studied her as she talked, and the admiration she had always seen there was somehow diminished. He sat in his high-backed desk chair, his plump stomach jiggling as he rocked back and forth with a nerve-grating squeak. He had a white linen handkerchief out and kept wiping the palms of his hands with it.

"Let's take 'em one at a time, Jane," he said. "The Board of Education can't act like a court of law. We've got hundreds of young people in this community to protect."

"From me!" she cried out indignantly.

"Now hold your horses, Jane. From even the suspicion of something that would harm them. Now in a legal proceeding, if you were suspected of a crime, the D. A. would go before the grand jury for an indictment. They'd listen to the facts he presented and if they thought there was sufficient evidence to warrant it, they'd hand down an indictment. Now an indictment doesn't mean you're guilty. It means there's enough evidence to justify a trial. The Board of Education has, in effect, handed down an indictment against you, Jane. There's enough smoke to justify calling out the fire department, if you'll forgive a homely simile. That's the status at the moment. With one exception. If you choose to resign and let the whole thing die, they're willing to let it die. If you don't—well,

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they've got to protect the kids and they'll have to present their evidence and bring charges. But they can't let you go on teaching without getting clear to the bottom of it, Jane. That's the board's position."

She sat very still for a moment. "All right. Now talk to me as my lawyer."

The blue eyes fixed on her steadily. "Are you guilty, Jane?"

She stood up. "I resent your asking me that, Ed. I resent it deeply."

"Easy does it," he said with a faint smile. "I'd ask any client that. Just for the record. Are you guilty, Jane?"

Slowly she sat down again. "No," she said, struggling to control her voice.

"Now you'll pardon a little plain language, Jane. You never made a pass at the Mangan boy?"

"That—that monster?"

"That's what he claims, Jane," Daley said softly. "He says you hate him so much because he turned you down."

"Judge Daley, I—"And then the tight cords of control snapped and she began to weep uncontrollably.

He sat there, watching her, his blue eyes narrowed. When she had quieted down he began to talk again in a deliberately conversational tone. "Sex is a funny thing," he said. "It's a healthy and happy part of most normal people's lives. But there's an awful lot of people walking around that you and I know who aren't normal about it. They use it to prove something; they use it to punish themselves or someone else; they dream about it and build it up in their minds and then cover it over with nastiness. They look at a girl like you, and they know you've been married and that you don't have a man of your own, and they think maybe you're wide open for it. They hope you are. And if you smile at them in the most innocent and friendly way they think it's an invitation. If you dance with them, they hope they're right in thinking you're dancing a little too close and that *that's* an invitation. And if you don't do any of those things they think you're playing hard to get. That's a hazard you face, Jane—being a beautiful girl, and a once-married girl, and a no-man girl. You can't avoid it. So you're innocent of these charges. But somebody's built something up out of your innocent friendliness, or somebody hates you because you said 'No' and really meant it. You're caught in it. You can deny all this till hell freezes over, Jane, but by the time you're acquitted there isn't going to be a soul in this town that'll be sure about you. Jane, you can win at a hearing, but you can't win at living—if you see what I mean."

"I see." It was almost a whisper.

"Then there's Terry," Ed Daley said. "Can you imagine what it'll be like for him? Kids jeering at him. 'Your mother did something

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nasty with Pat Mangan.' He'll be in fights. There's crazy women that won't want their girl children to play with him. 'Like mother, like son,' they'll say. Oh, I'd like to bet I could get you acquitted in court, Jane. But can you afford the cost of winning? I'm not talking about my fee, you understand. Some jury can say 'Not Guilty,' but you and Terry will be smeared from head to foot for the rest of your lives." He paused to dry his hands once more on the handkerchief. "As your lawyer—and as your friend—I advise you to resign and go quietly away with your boy."

She was silent for a long time, then she said something that startled him. "Before I decide I think I have to put it up to Terry," she said.

His eyebrows shot up. "Eleven years old?"

"Sometimes we have to grow up sooner than we'd like," she said. "It's his life as well as mine. People are already 'giving me the eye,' Judge Daley—teachers, Doris Wilson, the kids in my English class. Maybe it's already happened to Terry. He may feel very strongly, one way or the other. I think I have to consider his feelings." She rose from her chair. "May I come back to see you in the morning?"

"Of course, my dear." He sat there, staring at her out of his narrowed blue eyes. "Believe me, I've advised you the best I know how."

"Thank you."

She drove in her small car from the Judge's office to Elm Street where she and Terry lived. It had always been a warm, friendly street. Now it seemed to her that doors and windows were closed to her, that all she saw was people's backs. It was probably imagination.

As she pulled up in front of the house, she saw Terry sitting at the top of the porch steps. She sat behind the wheel for a minute, gathering her forces. He looked, suddenly, very lonely, very small. He was a fine, sturdy boy with Bill's wide smile and easy laughter. But he also had a serious bent, an adultness surprising for his age. He was a child, but he was also her most cherished companion. He was fun. He was—Terry.

Well, it had to be faced.

As she walked up the path he rose, then came down to the foot of the steps to meet her. Before she reached him she saw the troubled look on his face. Her heart sank. Had it already happened to him?

"Hi, Mom," he said.

"Hi, darling."

"I'm glad you got home," he said. "I've been trying to figure out what to do."

"Do? About what, Terry."

"Something kind of funny," he said, and he didn't mean amusing. "When I got home I found this stuck to the front door with a thumb tack. I kind of hate to show it to you."

But he took a crumpled piece of

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paper from his jacket pocket and handed it to her. She took one look at it and a wave of cold sickness swept over her. It was a crude drawing of a nude woman, and under it was scrawled a five-letter word the meaning of which she wasn't sure Terry would know. But she saw from his face that he did know. Elm Street and the cottage began to move around her in a dizzy circle.

"You could get into trouble for that, couldn't you, Mom?" Terry's voice came from a long way off. "You could get arrested for that, couldn't you?"

That was exactly what she had thought—until a few hours ago.

She took Terry away from Lakeview for supper. Somehow the cottage felt like a goldfish bowl, with the whole town peering in at them. She knew of a little Inn in the next town and she thought it unlikely the story would have reached that far. Terry, aware that something was wrong, made no effort to pry it out of her. They had a pleasant table in the corner of an old-fashioned dining room with a big open fireplace at the far end. There were only half a dozen other patrons. No one paid any attention to the handsome woman and her equally attractive son.

Jane only toyed with her food. Halfway through dinner Terry said, "You better tell me what's bothering you, Mom. It's not just that—that drawing, is it?"

So she told him, as simply and directly as she knew how. He listened, without interrupting, his eyes very wide and round. When she had finished he spoke again, without hesitation.

"So we fight them, Mom. We make them take it back, and we make them put Pat Mangan and the others that have been saying things in jail."

She went on, then, with the advice Paul Danning and Judge Daley had given her. He was silent for a long time, and when he spoke she was very proud of him.

"If I stole something and then ran away, it wouldn't do any good," he said, "because I'd know I'd stolen it and running away wouldn't help. But if we ran away now, Mom, it wouldn't be like that, because you know it's a lie, and I know it's a lie."

"Bless you, darling," she said, and her voice was unsteady.

"There'd be nothing on our conscience then," he said. He screwed up his face in a way that made her heart pound against her ribs it was so reminiscent of Bill. "But oh brother," he said, "I'd like to fight 'em. I'd like to fight 'em awfully, Mom!"

It would have embarrassed him if she'd followed her instinct and taken him in her arms then and there. Her eyes were swimming with tears. "I'd like to fight 'em

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too, Terry. Only—shall we sleep on it and talk some more about it at breakfast?"

"Sure, Mom. Whatever you want to do is okay with me. I guess you know that. Only—only they hadn't ought to get away with it."

"No," she said, managing a smile, "they hadn't ought to."

Shortly after that they went out to the parking lot to their car. Just as she was getting in on the driver's side, Jane noticed a figure across the way that startled her. It was a young man sitting astride an idling motorcycle. He had on a black leather coat, a black helmet, and goggles that hid his face. The lights in the parking lot were too dim for her to make any sort of positive identification, but she had an uneasy feeling that the motorcycle rider was Pat Mangan. He and his gang rode motor bikes around town. Then she chided herself for seeing something everywhere she looked. She didn't mention it to Terry when they got into the car.

She pulled out of the parking lot and headed toward Lakeview. Instinctively she glanced up into the rear-view mirror and saw, with a little chill of anxiety, that the motorcycle had also pulled out and was rolling along behind her, about twenty yards to the rear.

"Terry?"

"Yes, Mom?"

"Did you notice a man on a motorcycle back there in the parking lot?"

"Yeah. I just saw him in the distance, sort of."

"I had a funny feeling it was Pat Mangan. He's following us now. I think I'll slow down and let him pass."

Terry squirmed around in his seat. "He's slowing down too, Mom."

A wave of panic suddenly swept over her. The road between here and Lakeview was sparsely populated. She determined to pull into the first lighted house she saw and call the State troopers.

"Mom." Terry's voice had a small, frightened quality to it. "There's two of 'em now. One just pulled out from the side of the road. And—and there's another one!"

Jane stepped hard on the gas and the little car jumped forward. She glanced up into the mirror. There were four headlights in her wake now, and even as she looked a fifth pulled out from the side.

"What do they want, Mom?" Terry asked.

She looked down at him. The color had left his face, but his eyes were bright and brave.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm going to stop at the first lighted house we come to. You keep watching out the rear window, will you?"

She was doing sixty when Terry warned her. "One of 'em's pulling up to pass us, Mom."

Even as he spoke she heard the roar of the motorcycle's exhaust.

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It streaked past her and for an instant a grinning, goggled face peered at her and a high-pitched voice screamed at her—the single word that had been scrawled on the obscene drawing Terry had found. Then another rider came, and another, and another. They passed so close that it seemed they must scrape her fenders, and each passing rider screamed the dreadful word. She was now shaking from head to foot. The tail-lights of the four machines whizzed around a curve ahead of her. The fifth was still tailing her, inexorably. She couldn't stop. As she raced around the curve she saw, to her astonishment, that all the tail-lights had disappeared.

"They've gone, Mom!" Terry said.

Then a moment later, bitterly, she realized the maneuver. They had pulled over to the side of the road and switched off their lights, allowing her to pass; for suddenly all five headlights were behind her again. Now the ghastly business started over. A screaming rider seemed to lean into the window of her car, shrieking the foul word at her. Then another, and another. She was gasping for breath, clinging to the wheel, trying to edge away from them.

"Mom!" Terry screamed at her.

The wheel was suddenly wrenched out of her hand. Without realizing it she had finally edged over onto a soft shoulder. The car plunged wildly through a rail fence and down an embankment. Her one instinct was to reach for Terry—to protect him. Then blackout . . .

Her first awareness was of the sound of Terry's voice, pleading. "Mom! Mom! Come on, Mom. Please!"

Her head was splitting, but she was lying on something soft and comfortable. There was an odd taste in her mouth which she suddenly recognized as the taste of brandy. She opened her eyes. Soft, gentle light was all around her. Then suddenly Terry's face came into focus.

"Hi!" she managed.

"Gee, Mom, you had the bewadding scared out of me," Terry said. He turned his head. "She's come around okay, Mr. Beaumont."

Rust-colored curtains were drawn over what she guessed to be a picture window. There was a big fieldstone fireplace opposite the couch where she lay, and if the picture over the mantle wasn't an original Picasso it was a magnificent reproduction of one.

"A little more brandy, Mrs. Wardman? I think you've been pretty lucky, but we've sent for the doctor in case."

She turned her head. Standing back of the couch, looking down at her in profile, was one of the handsomest men she ever remem-

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bered seeing. He looked like the head of a golden-haired Apollo taken from an old Greek coin. There was a bright-colored scarf at his neck, and his gray tweed jacket was expensive stuff. She had been aware of a slight British accent in his speech. Beaumont! She tried, in her still befuddled mind, to place the name.

"I think I'm all right," she said. "But perhaps, just another taste of the brandy. I—"

He smiled, a curiously bitter smile. He lifted a decanter from a table back of the couch and filled a jigger. Then he turned to give it to her. Jane felt her breath drag into her lungs and she had difficulty stifling a scream. The other half of Beaumont's face was a monstrosity. The left eye was drawn down at the corner in a leering expression. His cheek and jaw had been smashed out of human semblance and were covered by a mass of scar tissue, red and white and purple. The ear, once almost faunlike in shape, was horribly lacerated.

"Go ahead! Let it come! Scream if you like!" he almost shouted at her.

Terry spoke in the most matter-of-fact tone. "You remember, Mom. John Beaumont, the movie actor that got in the car smashup? We used to go to all his pictures, remember? We always knew he had a house near here, but I guess he doesn't go around much. He says some day they may be able to fix his face."

"I—I'm sorry, Mr. Beaumont," Jane said. "I—it—"

"Don't be sorry. Everyone does it," he said harshly. Then he looked at Terry. In doing so he turned so that she saw only the handsome profile which had driven ninety per cent of American womanhood into trances for the brief years of his success. "All except this boy," he said. "The first person—since it happened—who didn't flinch; who acted as though it was—was *nothing!*"

"Mr. Beaumont heard the crash when we went off the road, Mom," Terry said. "This house is quite a little way back from the highway. He came and found us and carried you up here."

"By some miracle your car stayed upright," Beaumont said. "Not even a pane of glass broken. I thought it was safe to move you."

She was remembering—the roar of exhausts, the grinning, goggled faces, the filthy word.

Beaumont's voice broke through the memory, clear and hard. "Terry's been telling me what's been happening to you today, Mrs. Wardman. It seems he trusted me on sight—the greatest compliment anyone ever paid me. It's a pretty horrible situation. And these goons that drove you off the road—you can't identify any of them?"

She shook her head.

"I must say I agree with Terry—

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though you haven't asked me," Beaumont said.

"Agree with Terry?"

"Of course," Beaumont said in his cold, hard voice. "Fight! All the way from hell to breakfast. *Fight!*"

It was as though it was meant to happen on cue. There was the sound of smashing glass, quantities of it. The rust-colored curtain over the picture window billowed in. A large stone rolled out from under the edge. Outside a voice chanted —the dreadful word, the five-letter word, over and over.

"Turn out the lights, Terry," Beaumont said quietly. "The switch is on the wall to the left of you there."

The lights went out, but moonlight poured through a window on the other side of the room. She saw him standing there, tall, handsome—listening. The maniacal voice outside screamed the word again.

John Beaumont moved across the room to the front door. A pottery jug stood by the door. There was an umbrella and several sticks in it. He took out one of the sticks, a heavy blackthorn with big knob for a handle.

"Fight was what I said, Mrs. Wardman." He turned to her with a bitter chuckle, and the horror side of his face was exposed in the moonlight. "Maybe I can frighten them with this!" he said. Then he was gone, slamming the front door behind him.

She heard him striding down the gravel driveway toward the screaming voice....

The voice stopped the instant the sound of the slamming front door reverberated over the sloping lawn and garden in front of the house. John Beaumont hadn't gone fifteen yards down the driveway, listening all the while for some sound of the intruder, when the stillness was ripped apart by the noise of a starting motorcycle. The intruder was off in a burst of exhaust-roar. Just one. Only one of them had come back.

Beaumont stopped, gripping the blackthorn stick, choked by anger that tensed all his muscles. There were jeering voices in his own background, jealous voices that had wondered, "How will he make out with the fair sex now?"—voices that said he'd been drunk when his car tumbled down a California mountainside and left him with half a face; voices that said it was rumored he was a dope addict; regretful voices on the telephone, trying to conceal a kind of loathing, saying, "I've been meaning to get in to see you, darling, but I've been so terribly, terribly busy—what with retakes, and costumes for the new picture." No one seemed to want to accept the simple truth of a mechanical failure in his car. No one seemed to have cared for the mind and the spirit that were John Beaumont. Only the face, half of which was gone. It

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seemed to him they were like Jane Wardman's tormentor, jeering at him from a safe distance. He had heard the sound of it again tonight, and it generated a cold fury in him.

He was about to turn back toward the house when he saw the lights of a car coming up the driveway. That would be the doctor he'd phoned after carrying Jane Wardman from the wreck of her car to his living-room couch—the man young Terry had said was the family doctor.

Stephen Grant was one of that rapidly disappearing fraternity, the general practitioner. He was sixty years old, a gentle, tired man. He was as much of a landmark in Lakeview as the elms and oaks that graced the village green. He had brought half of Lakeview's living population into the world. He would have said that he knew their weaknesses and their strengths, and would have judged them a pretty decent lot.

A man used to physical horrors, even Dr. Grant found it difficult not to react to Beaumont's tragedy. It was hard to keep from looking away, in sympathy and embarrassment.

"I knew you lived here, Mr. Beaumont, but I haven't had the pleasure of meeting you before."

"A dubious pleasure," Beaumont muttered. "Don't be afraid to look at it, Doctor."

"My dear sir, I—"

"The patient's inside."

Beaumont led the way into the house. He switched on the lights. Jane was sitting up on the couch, her arm around Terry. Beaumont answered the question in Jane's eyes.

"Hightailed it out of here when they heard me coming," he said.

She turned to Dr. Grant. "Terry told me he'd gotten Mr. Beaumont to call you, Dr. Steve," she said. "I wasn't sure you'd come."

"Now, Jane, is that a way to talk?" The doctor pulled up a chair beside the couch.

Jane glanced up at Beaumont. "Dr. Grant is a member of the Board of Education."

The lighter in Beaumont's hand paused halfway to his cigarette. "If I had known that I don't think I'd have allowed Dr. Grant to enter my house," he said.

"Now see here, Mr. Beaumont—"

"You have a patient to attend to, Doctor. I suggest you get on with it," Beaumont said sharply. He crossed the room and pulled the curtains back from the broken picture window.

"I bet that costs a lot of money," Terry said at his elbow.

"Yes, quite a bit."

"Did you see him at all, Mr. Beaumont?"

"No, he took off in a hurry," Beaumont said.

A few moments later Dr. Grant got up from the chair beside the couch. "I think you've been very

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lucky, Jane. A sedative so you can get some sleep. Then tomorrow, if you feel any unusual aches or pains, come and see me." He hesitated. "Have you any idea who it was who drove you off the road?"

Jane started to answer and then suddenly realized she couldn't. If she said what she thought, she could almost see the doctor's mind working.

"She knows quite well who it was," Beaumont said. "It was one Pat Mangan and a group of hoodlums who cycle around the countryside raising hell. She doesn't want to tell you that, Doctor, because you might think that she's angry at him for having rejected her immoral advances."

"Mr. Beaumont, I don't understand your connection with this affair or why you choose to abuse me, but I tell you, sir—"

"Don't tell me, Dr. Grant," Beaumont said. "Mrs. Wardman won't be around to see you if she has any little aches or pains, because no sensible person goes to the source of the pain to get cured of it. This accident wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for you, Doctor, and your tinhorn vice tribunal. I suppose you joined with the honorable Judge and the eminently respectable Principal in advising Mrs. Wardman and her son to leave town and let the mud stick where it may?"

Dr. Grant's face was interesting to watch. He was, at first, astonished by this attack from a stranger, then angry, and finally relaxed into a kind of grim resignation. He ignored Beaumont and turned to Jane.

"I suppose, sooner or later, you'd have to come to me, Jane, and we'd have had to talk about it. It might as well be now, though I admit I resent Mr. Beaumont's abuse since he has nothing whatever to do with it."

"You're quite wrong there, Doctor," Beaumont said. "I live in this community—though no one seems to have bothered to pay much attention to the fact. I pay taxes here—among them, a healthy school tax. When I learn that the Board of Education can destroy two human beings, without a hearing, without the presentation of any real evidence beyond some anonymous letters—"

"The Mangan boy testified. That was evidence," Doctor Grant said.

"The Mangan boy!" Beaumont's anger spilled over again. "And don't call him a 'boy' Doctor. He's nineteen—old enough to be a soldier in this country's army! If he and I met as enemies on the battlefield, armed only with trench knives, the odds would be against me—the thirty-five-year-old one. He's not a boy! Not under the law. Not any way. He's a man. A poor excuse for one—but a man!"

"There were others who didn't

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appear before the Board," the Doctor reminded him.

"Bully for them!"

"Let's get the facts straight, Mr. Beaumont. The anonymous letters came to Judge Daley as chairman of the Board. He acted with the utmost discretion. Before presenting the case to the Board he made private inquiries. He had the Mangan boy in his office. He had five other individuals who were mentioned. He hates anonymous attacks as much as anyone, as much as you do. But after he'd talked to Mangan and the others he had no choice. He had to present it to the rest of us—keeping back as much as he could so that the whole thing wouldn't spread like fire."

"He was Mrs. Wardman's friend!" Beaumont protested.

"As your friend I might take a drink with you, Mr. Beaumont. As your doctor I might have to tell you that alcohol could destroy your health. I consider Judge Daley's first obligation in this instance was as chairman of the Board. The Board is not a court, Mr. Beaumont. It is a group responsible for the education of the community's young people. We have to protect them. We can't wait for a courtroom conviction if we feel the children are in jeopardy. We can't always wait to be one hundred per cent fair."

"Then you admit you haven't been?" Beaumont asked.

"On the contrary, I think we acted in the only way we could."

"From me?" Jane asked, almost inaudibly. The doctor drew a deep breath.

"Yes," he said.

"Do you believe the charges that have been made against me?"

"That is beside the point. As a member of the Board I can only say there is enough suspicion to make action imperative."

"But do you believe it?" Jane insisted. "You have been a friend, Doctor. You were Bill's friend. You brought Terry into the world."

Pain twisted the doctor's face. "I'm a doctor, Jane. I've seen this kind of thing before. You're a vital and attractive woman, cut off for the last six years from the love and affection and emotional outlets such a person requires. Sometimes the pressure can get too great."

"And so testified at the alleged hearing?" Beaumont asked.

"As a doctor I had to say it was *possible* for a person of fine character to crack up under certain pressures. Now, wait before you say anything, Jane. Innocent or guilty, the whole idea of fighting this charge is a normal one, but in my judgment a tragically frustrating one. The more it is opened up, the stronger the community suspicions will grow, no matter what the evidence. To fight it will do you and Terry much more harm than to accept it as a bad break, to resign, and to start over again quietly somewhere else."

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"And it would take the Board off an uncomfortable spot," Beaumont said. "Jane and Terry are to be slandered and driven out of town on the basis of anonymous letters and the testimony of a vicious young hoodlum?"

"And the testimony of five other witnesses whom Judge Daley would have to call if forced to it."

"Who? Who are these five, Dr. Steve?" Jane asked.

"I don't know, and I'm glad I don't. Daley quite properly withheld their names and they will remain secret unless there is a showdown. There is no point in destroying five other families if the end result is to be the same." The doctor turned his weary eyes to Beaumont. "I'm a lot older than you, Mr. Beaumont. I've made an unhappy discovery in my time. Righteous indignation is a fine catharsis—but an impractical weapon." He looked back at Jane. "Can I drive you and Terry home? I understand your car isn't usable."

"No, Doctor!" Beaumont said quickly. "It would never do for you to be seen publicly with Jane. Mr. Anonymous might add you to his private list of amorous old goats! I'll drive Jane home—and stand guard against the rocks and the words. But tomorrow, Doctor, look out! It's true I haven't learned your cynical lesson about righteous indignation, so, as a member of the Board, you may get hit with a stray brick!"

(continued on page 118)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: RUFUS KING

TITLE: *The Patron Saint of the Impossible*

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Monsignor Lavigny

LOCALE: Halcyon, Florida

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *It seemed a hopeless case. All the evidence pointed to Candice's sweetheart—he had motive, opportunity, and the hot blood of a Latin lover. So, again, Monsignor Lavigny put his faith in Saint Jude...*

THE MURDER BACKDROP WAS THE Florida room of the Hoffmann home in Halcyon, which is a small town inhabited by the modestly retired, graced by seasonal tourists and native crackers, and enlivened by a thin lunatic fringe of horse-happy railbirds, amiable bookies, and glazed divorcees. It rests, this gentle haven, on the Atlantic seaboard between the gilt splendors of Miami Beach and the ormolu patina of Fort Lauderdale.

The Hoffmann house is one of the older and more pretentious of Halcyon's estates, being surrounded with lush masses of semi-tropical shrubbery and flowering trees that afford a screening of privacy from all neighboring houses.

The hour when Monsignor Lavigny became involved in the crime (he lived directly to the east of the Hoffmanns) was eight o'clock on a Tuesday morning in April—during a tranquil moment in which the Monsignor was annoying several aphids on his Bella Romana camel-

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lias with a nicotine spray. Sunshine slanted gently onto his silver-crested head and distinguished appearance, which bore a nostalgic resemblance to Walter Hampden in the actor's turn-of-the-century portrayal of Cardinal Richelieu.

The people involved in the tragedy he knew very well. They were Candice Hoffmann, the murdered man's teenage niece-and-ward, and a black-browed athletic young ox with the romantic name of Raul Eusebio Fuentes, who was the Hoffmanns' neighbor to the west.

The youngsters were, of course, in love. It was the first and therefore the fiercest sort of blind emotion on Candice's part, but hardly the first on Raul's whose reservoir of sentiment had begun operations in his birthplace in the Oriente province of Cuba at the tender age of twelve. This in no way diluted the young man's intensity, nor the passionate resentment he felt toward Hoffmann (now a corpse) over Hoffmann's refusal to consent to his ward's marriage while she remained a minor and legally under his skeletal thumb.

Perhaps skeletal was a touch extreme, as Monsignor Lavigny believed that Hoffmann's air of fleshlessness, both physically and in the amenities, was basically due to the man's several ailments, among which was a rickety heart, and all of which combined to make him a decidedly acid character.

It was a character to be deplored, even for its lesser sins of pride, conceit, and a miserly grip on possessions both human and material. So convinced was Hoffmann of his control over his body and mind that he even refused to acknowledge the existence of physical pain. As for the parading of any bodily deficiency, that was out of the question. And yet, in spite of it all, Monsignor Lavigny had always looked upon Hoffmann as a soul to be enticed into the fold. Difficult, and now (thanks to a bashed skull) beyond further attempt.

The fourth member of the blood-tinged masque was Hoffmann's wife, Elise. She seemed a brave and handsome asset, much younger than her husband, and a woman whom Monsignor Lavigny considered to have been a bride of circumstance. Just what the circumstances were that had induced her into a marriage with Hoffmann he did not know, but he imagined they had lain within the periphery of economics, perhaps of loneliness, perhaps of some fortuitous avenue of escape. Gratitude too was a possible explanation—but never love.

The curtain rose at eight in the morning on the tooting of an automobile horn.

Monsignor Lavigny left the outraged aphids in a state of suspended peace, and responded with a wave to the gloved hand of Elise Hoffmann as she drove past in her foreign convertible, heading for home. The glimpse of her cotton-crisp

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freshness and gaily insolent excuse-for-a-hat blended pleasingly with the tone of the morning.

As he later told his young friend Chuck Day of the sheriff's CBI division, not many minutes seemed to have passed before the Monsignor heard the scream. Even across the distance that separated the two houses, the scream came clearly through the masking flora as one of shock mingled with horror.

The prelate cast dignity to the winds and broke into a lope that halted at the open jalousies of the Hoffmann Florida room, where the scene was appallingly similar to the final curtain of a Greek tragedy.

Elise Hoffmann, still hatted and gloved, stood stage-center and had been turned, apparently, into a pillar of stone. At her feet, with his acid face flecked with blood, lay Hoffmann, flat as only the dead can lie flat. Then to complete the ghastly tableau, under an archway leading into a central hall, young Candice was stretched out on terrazzo tiling in a state of collapse.

The pillar of stone swayed as shock began to recede from Elise. Her clouded eyes seemed to clear as she focused them upon Monsignor Lavigny.

"He ran out," she said. "He struck Candice brutally—senselessly—"

"Who did, Elise?"

There was a flicker of irritation in her voice, as though the answer should be obvious.

"Why, Raul, of course."

"The thought is beyond belief," Monsignor Lavigny said to Chuck Day as they sat in the Lavigny patio eating cashew nuts and drinking a cooled chablis.

"The evidence proves otherwise, Father." (The prelate preferred the usage of that title by his friends rather than that of Monsignor, with the latter's stiltedness and variety of mispronunciations.) "I am sorry about it, too, because I know you like the bum."

"Bum? No, never that. Patriot, if you wish. Raul is a youngster who is deeply, devotedly in love and hence unpredictable; but he is neither a killer nor a bum."

Chuck, whose mind and experience inclined him to the dogma that a fact was ruler-straight, could never accustom himself to Monsignor Lavigny's proved ability to throw a few curves across the plate. There had been that child-kidnaping case last year, the beach robbery of the Terressi diamonds the year before....

"What has patriotism got to do with it?" he asked skeptically, nevertheless filing the thought for further consideration. "Raul Fuentes has been naturalized and living here for years."

"Perhaps it has everything to do with it. Or nothing. There is a parable—"

Chuck interrupted with a certain firmness, but still within the limits

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of respect. Monsignor Lavigny's parables were notoriously of interminable length. "Father, let me give you the picture as we are turning it over to the county prosecutor. I think you'll agree that the job was one of passion? Balked love, then murderous hate?"

"Yes—with some reservations."

"But what's left? Money? Profit? Neither motive figures. Whatever else he is, Fuentes is a rich kid, and Candice is a wealthy girl. Just happens she's under age. They could elope and get hitched by some J.P. up in Georgia but they're both sincerely religious, and surely such a marriage would not be acceptable in the eyes of the church. Especially with her guardian forbidding it."

Monsignor Lavigny absently inclined his head.

"Actually," Chuck went on, "they had no alternative but to persuade Hoffmann to change his decision. Do you know his reasons for objecting to the match?"

"I did talk with him, and it is possible to understand his point of view."

"It makes good sense to me too. Elise Hoffmann discussed it while you were staying over at the Sacred Heart with Candice." (This was the hospital where the young girl had been taken.) "Consider Raul's actions. He's in his early twenties and rich, but where does the dough come from?"

"Why, from his paternal estate down in Cuba, as I understand it."

"So he says. Then why within the past year did he set up a phony ranch in the boondocks west of Davie? Why does he keep a plane there which he pilots himself, and a camouflage stable of mixed-up plugs strictly out of old milk routes?"

Monsignor Lavigny smiled blandly. "Hope springs eternal, especially on the race track."

"Now, that's nonsense, Father, and you know it. If one of those antique platers even caught sight of a starting gate he'd collapse from fright. And what about Raul's habit of disappearing for a day, or a week, and then side-stepping questions as to where he was or why? According to Mrs. Hoffmann, even Candice can't dig it out of him."

"There are certain things that cannot be discussed except," Monsignor murmured, "in the confessional. If I may refer to certain of the martyrs—"

"Fuentes? A martyr?" In my book the guy's up to his neck in some sort of a racket."

"My reference was oblique."

"Well, there was nothing oblique about the three-cornered row Elise Hoffmann overheard yesterday morning before she drove over to Pompano. She got a load of it while she was packing a bag in her bedroom. Hoffmann, Candice, and Fuentes were in the patio just outside her windows. Fuentes gave them *both* the works, the gist being

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that either Hoffmann change his mind, or Candice agreed to forego the church and elope—and then he tacked on the threadbare old cliché of 'or else.'"

"The boy was overwrought. In his heart he did not mean it."

"Father, Father!" Chuck's tone was kindly with pity. "The evidence proves that Raul was sitting right at the table this morning while Hoffmann ate breakfast, and where he was killed."

"Did any of the servants—but they couldn't have. I remember that they are gone."

"Yes, the staff left yesterday to open up the Hoffmann summer place on Sea Island. The family were to drive up there today, which is why Elise Hoffmann made her early start back from Pompano." Chuck studied Monsignor Lavigny with a slight frown. "You have something on your mind, Father?"

"There is a definite contradiction. Please explain your conviction that Raul was seated at the breakfast table with Hoffmann."

"For one thing, you yourself were told by Mrs. Hoffmann that the man she saw escaping was Fuentes."

"The poor woman was in a state of shock."

"We'll have further confirmation when Candice recovers consciousness. But even if Candice didn't see who struck her, there is the circumstantial evidence of the drinking glass, and you can't get around it."

"What glass?"

"First, let's follow Elise Hoffmann's story. She waves hello to you as she drives by and you wave back. She puts the car in the garage, then carries her overnight bag into the house. She passes Candice's room and knows the girl is in it because through the closed door she hears Candice's portable TV set turned on. She leaves her overnight bag in Hoffmann's and her suite, figures he's breakfasting in the Florida room, and goes there. You know what she found."

"A shocking, hideous thing!"

"She is stunned almost senseless. I will admit—in fact, she admits it herself—that her vision may have become blurred by the shock. She sees this figure who she thinks is Fuentes—and the drinking glass proves he *was* Fuentes—doing a quicksilver exit towards the archway where he bumps into Candice, bashes her with some sort of metal bar, and beats it as Mrs. Hoffmann gets back her vocal powers and starts to screech."

Monsignor Lavigny said patiently, "The glass?"

"Yes, the all-important glass. Now, get this, Father. The breakfast table was laid for one—for Hoffmann. Candice had her own tray in her bedroom. Apart from other things like coffee and toast, there were a pitcher of orange juice and two glasses on the table. Both glasses had been used and each still contained some juice. One glass was

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beside Hoffmann's plate. The other was across the table where someone else has been sitting.

"Surely it was Candice, joining her uncle in a glass of orange juice after having prepared his breakfast?"

"No, Father—no on a couple of counts. Besides the fact that she was probably still in a huff over yesterday's row and therefore steering clear of Hoffmann, Elise Hoffmann tells me that Candice dislikes any citrus fruit or juice. All of which is purely academic, because of the fingerprints."

"On the second glass?"

"Yes. There are those of Fuentes where he held it. They have been identified by comparison with ones found on objects in his bathroom and on silver toilet articles on his dresser. Now, this is the clincher, Father. There are *also*—on that second glass, mind you—prints of the thumb and three fingers of Hoffmann's left hand, left there when he poured the orange juice into the glass and handed it to Fuentes."

Monsignor Lavigny shook his head sadly.

"We think," Chuck continued, "that Fuentes stepped over to renew his demands of yesterday, or possibly to apologize and make peace with Candice. We think what happened is that somehow Hoffmann had learned the nature of Fuentes's racket, the reason for his disappearances, and threatened exposure if the kid didn't give Candice up. Well, you know Fuentes. You can imagine how his hot Spanish blood took over." Chuck felt sudden contrition at the expression on Monsignor Lavigny's kindly face. "Do not take it so hard, Father. Isn't it possible even for you to be mistaken in a man's character?"

"I am not mistaken, but I am a bewildered and deeply disturbed old man."

"There's nothing to be bewildered about, Father."

Monsignor Lavigny disagreed, speaking with difficulty, as though he were trying to establish for himself a sounder belief in what he was saying. "At the Sacred Heart, after several hours at Candice's bedside, there was one moment, brief but perfectly sane and clear, when consciousness returned."

"She spoke? She recognized you?"

"She did. She had heard a crash as if someone had fallen—obviously her uncle, when he was killed. It took a moment or two for the sound to register, then she ran out of her bedroom and got as far as the archway to the Florida room when she was struck on the head and knew nothing further."

"She didn't see who it was?"

Monsignor Lavigny spoke more hesitantly. He was reluctant to go on, but he managed it. "I must tell you that at this point her voice weakened in answer to my question as to whether her attacker might have been Raul. She said

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that was impossible, that Raul was in New York City this morning, that she had seen him. Then her voice faltered even more and she relapsed into coma. She has been so ever since."

"Obviously it was delirium speaking. Just an hallucination."

"Perhaps, and yet you have not found him in his house, nor out at the ranch, and his plane is gone."

"Of course it is. When he fled from the Hoffmanns' he would have driven directly out to the ranch and used the plane for escape."

Monsignor Lavigny said with what, for him, held a quality of fierceness, "If it only were not for Elise Hoffmann's identification and the two sets of fingerprints on the glass!"

"An unsurmountable if, Father."

"Yes, perhaps. I can conceive that under certain provocation Raul might kill—but as for his striking Candice, never!"

"He may not have known who it was—just heard a person running towards the archway and struck blindly."

"I cannot bring myself to accept that. I have had a sudden thought—it may be fantasy, yet might lead us to the truth. I shall be gone from here until tomorrow evening. And you—you will not be offended, not think me officious, if I make a few suggestions?"

"Why do you suppose I'm here? What are they, Father?"

"I would continue the search for the murder weapon or—what may even be more important—try to establish its absence from the place where it might normally be."

"I take it you have an idea what it was?"

"Forgive me if I seem evasive, but to be more specific at this moment might bring grievous injustice upon the innocent. I would suggest that you look for a glove that is perhaps stained with dark grease. Also it might be advisable to consider the *types* of glasses that contained the orange juice."

"You're confusing me badly, Father."

"Have patience, and a reliance upon your own excellent deductive powers. Your department has a plane at its disposal, has it not?"

"Yes."

"Then a flight to Sea Island might also be indicated, and a questioning of the Hoffmann staff."

Chuck looked at the prelate sharply. "Along any particular line?"

"Perhaps as to any unusual visitor who may have called on the Hoffmanns during the past few weeks."

"Unusual in what way?"

"Let us say in the sense of being a stranger to the servants." Monsignor Lavigny grew deadly serious. "And this is the most important suggestion of all."

"Yes?"

"You might arrange with Mother Superior at the Sacred Heart to per-

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mit two women from your staff, dressed in nursing habits, to alternate watches in keeping a constant guard over Candice."

"There's a man posted there now, but we'll do as you say. Both Candice and Mrs. Hoffmann are under protection. Until Fuentes is caught."

"Until," Monsignor Lavigny murmured in polite correction, "the murderer is trapped."

"And you, Father? Where will you be while we're doing all this?"

Monsignor Lavigny's smile was both enigmatic and strangely affectionate. His eyes held what Chuck Day later described to his wife as a beyond-the-horizon look.

"I am considering a pilgrimage accompanied by Saint Jude. He has helped me in the past, and I shall ask him to help me now. Saint Jude, you know, is the patron saint of the impossible, of the seeming impasse. He is of inestimable assistance at a time when there seems no hope left."

The following evening, again in the patio with its velvet chiaroscuro of moonlight and the night-released scent of jasmine, Monsignor Lavigny sat in troubled contemplation, absently sipping his after-dinner brandy and awaiting the arrival of the CBI man.

The prelate had paused at the Sacred Heart on his way home from the airport and had satisfied himself that Candice was under watchful observation by women from the sheriff's department in their borrowed nursing habits.

He had learned that the girl's condition remained unchanged, that the coma continued unbroken. Elise Hoffmann had come to the hospital and had also telephoned anxious inquiries numerous times, as had many of Candice's young friends. There had been (perhaps understandably) no message or inquiry from Raul Fuentes — this, even though the Hoffmann case continued to be front page news.

Chuck came. He slumped into a chair, accepted brandy, and went directly to the point.

"Father, your suggestions have opened up a new slant. We believe now that Elise Hoffmann did the job, but the evidence is slim, circumstantial, and a topflight trial counsel might easily get her off."

"My thoughts lay that way, too. I suspected, and I still suspect, a frame-up. The nature of it is almost clear, but not quite. We will find it to have been exceedingly clever, the work of a truly devious mind. Is Mrs. Hoffmann under arrest?"

"No. She is under surveillance. We won't haul her in until we've got Fuentes. The case against that young buzzard is still too strong. Unless," Chuck added with a friendly grin, "your pilgrimage with Saint Jude cleared his slate?"

"To a certain extent it did—at least to my own satisfaction. I am infinitely grateful. When I flew to New York I carried with me a

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good photograph of Raul. You will remember Elise Hoffmann saying that when she passed the closed door of Candice's bedroom she heard a TV program going on inside?"

"Yes?"

"Well, it occurred to me that the broadcast might have offered a solution to Candice's apparent hallucination when she told me that she, with herself being here in Halcyon, had *seen* Raul in New York City yesterday morning."

"It was the right hour for the Dave Garroway program 'Today'—people in the street before the exhibition hall window. Haven't I read or seen—"

"Yes, there was nothing especially original in my thought, nor in the fact itself. I, too, have read of similar incidents—one in which a spectator in a ringside seat at a televised prizefight was recognized by his wife, who was watching the program at home. She later divorced him, I believe, naming his rather notorious lady companion at the bout as co-respondent. No, the thought was nothing new, but it served as a possible lead to casting doubt on Elise Hoffmann's story."

"What's the result?"

"Mr. Garroway was most courteous, most kind—as were Mr. Lescoulie and Mr. Blair. They studied Raul's picture, and did remember a man who might have been he. They had noticed the man because of his gestures."

"But why on earth would Fuentes risk showing himself on a nationwide hookup if he wanted to keep his 'mysterious' absences secret? It doesn't make sense."

"A man in love often makes no sense. He was asking forgiveness."

"Of Candice?"

"Yes, for his tantrum with its hotheaded 'or else.' He knew Candice's habit of watching that broadcast, and took a chance on her doing so yesterday morning. Raul's gestures were quite compelling in, Mr. Garroway informed me, an operatic fashion. A Latinesque pantomiming of forgive-me-and-I-love-you, done with bravura."

"Would they make the identification under oath in court, or by sworn affidavit?"

"No, I asked. They would hesitate to do so. There would be too strong an element of doubt."

"At least the kid's got one strike in his favor. There's the hotel he stayed at, or friends. He should be able to prove an alibi."

"He might not be willing to."

"Why not?"

"He may refuse flatly to talk about his business in New York or his contacts there."

"If he doesn't, the two sets of fingerprints on that second glass will knock our case against Elise Hoffmann into the nearest ashcan."

"Just how strong has it become?"

Chuck gave the prelate a concise account. The murder weapon had been found. Its place of conceal-

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ment was in a large clump of star jasmine. It was a jack bar, looked for specifically because of its absence from where it should have been (as Father had suggested), along with the jack in the trunk compartment of Elise Hoffmann's car.

There was more. The two glasses were of different types. No gloves were found. They could have been disposed of later, and more carefully, than the jack bar.

The Sea Island questioning of the Hoffmann staff revealed that there had been a stranger. Ten days ago. He had been closeted with Hoffmann for over half an hour. No name, but the Hoffmann maid who had let him in offered a general description which included a noticeable cast in the man's left eye. Identification had proved simple—a local private investigator, well-known to the department and to Chuck. Up to the time of Hoffmann's death the private investigator had been in Hoffmann's employ—his assignment, to obtain evidence for a divorce. A Miami Beach character, a young muscle-operator of the Hercules type, came into the picture as the "other man." This handsome hulk and a legal separation from the Hoffmann assets by divorce offered plenty of motive for the elimination of Hoffmann . . .

A house boy interrupted. Mister Chuck was urgently wanted on the telephone.

Monsignor Lavigny, while Chuck went into the house, mused on all human frailty, deploring, yet understanding it very well. It was not for him to judge, certainly not for him to punish. That was within the province of the law, while the ultimate appeal lay in the discretion of God. What malignant germ was it that festered in the brain of murder? Never had it been isolated since the days of Cain. What flaw . . .

"Word from the office," Chuck said, rejoining him. "They caught Fuentes. His plane just landed at the ranch. He clammed up. A 'no comment' to end all 'no comments.' They put him in a car, started for headquarters, and he jumped. Now the boondocks have him, not us." Chuck smashed an angry fist into the palm of his hand. "One other report. The guard we've kept on Elise Hoffmann called in that she left the house and drove off in her convertible. Caught him without warning, too late to check on where she's heading. Father, we're doing just fine!"

Monsignor Lavigny stood up. "It would be wise for us to go to the Sacred Heart. On the way we can discuss the advisability of certain arrangements. I believe I can persuade Mother Superior to give her consent. Mrs. Hoffmann will take time to drive around while considering her next move. Before," he added softly, "she strikes again."

Owing to a regional wave of the

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Asian flu with its subsequent complications, and that vague *bête noir* elastically labeled virus, even some of the corridors of the Sacred Heart held beds, and a suppressed air of tension pervaded the hospital. With it existed a certain laxity of the less imperative regulations, while a greater than usual ebb and flow of traffic—nurses, sisters, interns, orderlies, visiting relatives, an occasional doctor—gave the place a slight semblance of Grand Central Station during this normally quiet evening hour.

Candice Hoffmann had been fortunate in having been placed in a private room, one vacated through a fatal case of pneumonia. It was a pleasant, impersonal room, its main furnishings being a hospital bed, a dresser, a locker, and some chairs. There were two doors, one to the corridor, one to a private bathroom. There was about the room an aseptic openness that made concealment impossible.

Two windows, open to the trade wind with its odors of the flowering night, were frames for pale moonlight, while a shaded night lamp washed faint amber across the bed's white pillow and the white-bandaged head with its contusion-marked face resting motionlessly upon it.

Chuck and Monsignor Lavigny stood in the bathroom, in tense expectancy. The bathroom door was opened a crack, sufficiently for them to have a view that included the bed and the corridor door. The two men were continuing an argument in whispers.

"Father, it is still a crime against the Federal government."

"Technically, yes. But isn't it the *intention* that truly constitutes a crime? More so, even, than the crime itself? Remember that Raul has been running guns and ammunition to the rebels at his own expense, paying for them out of his own pocket. There has never been any question of illicit gain. Granted he is a naturalized citizen, yet his roots go back to Cuba. He feels that his family and many of his friends have suffered intolerable injustices from the present regime."

"A case of patriotism once-removed."

"Precisely. And precisely the reason why he would rather suffer death than betray his rebel contacts by revealing the truth about his 'mysterious' disappearances. So far there exists no proof of his activities and he will never speak. Just as I, except for your confidential ear, shall never speak."

A sudden pressure of Chuck's fingers on Monsignor Lavigny's arm brought immobility and silence. The corridor door, observed through the crack, was opening.

Elise Hoffmann looked in, satisfying herself that the room, with the exception of the patient, was empty. She had been keeping the door under observation for the past five minutes from an inconspicuous

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post in the traffic-filled corridor, after having noted the departure from the room of a nurse who presumably had arranged her patient for the night.

She came inside and closed the door. A few hurried footsteps carried her to the bed where in fumbling haste her hands pulled the pillow from under the bandage-swathed head, while her dark, abandoned eyes flickered in apprehensive observation between pale windows and the closed corridor door.

She pressed the pillow firmly down on the bruise-marked face.

There was no movement, no struggle. A sound made Mrs. Hoffmann look toward the bathroom door which, remarkably, now stood open with, more remarkable still, that CBI man Mr. Day framed there with a Leica camera held against one eye. Then he was saying, almost casually, "All right, Miss Brown. I have it. You can get up now."

The strong arms of Miss Brown (sheriff's dept., physical ed. grad., adept at judo) gave a practiced shove, knocking Elise Hoffmann backward and into a fortuitously located chair.

Extraordinary, the mind, the nerves of a murderer, with that fierce egomaniac clinging to avoid punishment, to save his neck until the last ditch failed! Those were Monsignor Lavigny's thoughts as he watched Elise Hoffmann stiffen into an icy rage on the chair while, assisted by Chuck, Miss Brown was unswathed from bandages and cleaned of the grease-paint bruise marks that had camouflaged her face.

"I was rearranging the pillow more comfortably," Elise Hoffmann said in a clear and frigid tone. "Seeing you quite naturally gave me a shock. Unconsciously I put the pillow down. That photograph you have just taken, Mr. Day, shall be the basis of a suit I shall bring against your office."

No, there was not even a quiver, much less a break. Elise Hoffmann's control was superb and it was perfectly obvious that she intended to fight. Collapse had been expected, and certainly not this collected defiance.

Chuck took over.

Dispassionately, courteously, he outlined the case against her, tracing the probable moves, both physical and mental, she had gone through.

Her years of oppression under Hoffmann's domination, with a fretful hatred inevitably building up. The threat of imminent divorce proceedings, ruining her share under the community property law between husband and wife.

(Elise Hoffmann did not even start to break. She sat as a figure of chiseled stone, waiting for an idiot to finish with his maunderings. And Monsignor Lavigny again had that over-the-horizon look.)

Chuck continued. Opportunity

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presented itself with the morning of the servant-free house, when the staff would be gone at Sea Island, when Candice would, as was her habit, be breakfasting while watching TV in her bedroom, when Hoffmann would be breakfasting alone in the Florida room.

Opportunity aligned itself with the fortuitous clash overheard among Fuentes and Candice and Hoffmann. Fuentes stepped immediately into the role of being groomed as Suspect Number One for the proposed crime.

Then the actual, and this time the true steps. After passing Monsignor Lavigny with a toot of her horn and a good-morning hand wave, the car was garaged. The jack bar was removed from the trunk compartment.

(Elise Hoffmann's face remained a remotely interested, fashionable mask. Monsignor Lavigny had begun to mutter quietly in his Richelieu beard.)

Candice was, as expected, in her bedroom. Hoffmann was, as expected, breakfasting alone in the Florida room. Not much of a blow on the head was required to cause death—his rickety heart contributed to the result. He toppled sideways off the chair and crashed down on the floor. The sound of running footsteps—Candice. A hasty flattening against the wall beside the archway and a blow with the jack bar as Candice ran through—a blow to silence her as an eyewitness to the immediate picture of the crime.

(Elise Hoffmann smiled. Monsignor Lavigny's muttering grew faintly feverish.)

Chuck steadfastly went on. Not yet the screams. First, the run outdoors to conceal the jack bar among the jasmines. Then the hurried return to the Florida room with the assuming of a horror-stricken pose. Then the screams.

Chuck's recapitulation was a dud.

He felt swamped with weariness, a bitter wash of failure. The woman would never break.

In the hush of the room, as Chuck's voice died out, Elise Hoffmann laughed. A cold, amused, diamond-hard laugh.

"Isn't there a rather important piece of evidence omitted, Mr. Day? Even the newspaper accounts played it up quite strongly. I refer, of course, to the second glass?"

Yes, Chuck realized, her bastions of defense still held. She would never yield while the contradiction offered by the fingerprints remained unresolved. Disheartedly he noticed that Monsignor Lavigny's mutterings were approaching the decipherable. They seemed to be a murmured supplication to Saint Jude. Then the prelate's voice exploded with the effect of a minor bomb.

"I have it! The solution to the second glass. The glass was," he said, "a different type from the one beside your husband's plate, because it came from no set of glassware in your house."

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"Merely an odd one, Monsignor," Elise Hoffmann said indifferently. "A leftover from a former set."

Monsignor Lavigny wrapped himself in the full dignity of his high office. His voice might remotely be said to have thundered.

"Madame, we are through with lies! You had determined to make Raul Fuentes the scapegoat. You could not place him physically upon the scene, so you placed an object he had handled upon the scene.

"I am convinced that you stopped at Raul's house as you started off for Pompano to pick up such an object. You had the excuse of mediating the quarrel that had shortly occurred. But you did not need the excuse. You found him gone. You were able unobserved to find and take a glass, probably from his bathroom shelf.

"You were wearing driving gloves of chamois, the ones you wore when you waved to me, the ones you have since destroyed. You carried that glass with you to Pompano, guarding and preserving Raul's fingerprints with some protective covering such as a scarf.

"After you had killed your husband and struck Candice down, you concealed the jack bar, got the glass, poured orange juice into it and set it on the table—*after,* I am convinced, you had pressed your dead husband's fingerprints upon it to indicate that he had filled and handed the glass to Raul."

"You are convinced," Elise Hoffmann said. "But will a jury be?"

"They will be because you made one fatal error. When you pressed your husband's fingerprints upon the glass, *two of those prints were superimposed upon those of Raul.* Proving that Raul's were there first—and that your husband's were put on it after his death. You look ill, Madame—and well you may!"

She broke completely.

The moon continued its coursing through the scented night.

Raul had been intercepted, and released, in the hospital grounds on his way to Candice. He was with her now in the room to which she had been transferred when the sheriff's Miss Brown had taken her place.

Scotch and soda rested on the patio table.

"Father, was it Saint Jude?"

Monsignor Lavigny's voice mellowed with a modest note. "I am gratefully certain that it was. My own poor wits could never have accomplished it of themselves."

"And I suppose," said Chuck drily, "that it was Saint Jude who cracked Elise Hoffmann's nerve? That it was not you, Father, who made the flat statement that two of Hoffmann's prints were superimposed on those of Fuentes?"

Monsignor Lavigny's eyes were the essence of pious innocence as he said, "Well, weren't they?"

"No, Father—as you very well know."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CYRIL HARE**

TITLE: ***Cover Girl***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Markhampton, England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Deborah Franklin was breathtakingly beautiful—not like a film star or model, but like a classical goddess. When you looked at her, you saw nothing else...*

JOHN FRANKLIN, WHO WAS MY contemporary at Oxford, invited me to stay with his people at Markhampton for the Markshire Hunt Ball. He and his sister were getting up a small party for it, he said.

"I've never met your sister," I remarked. "What is she like?"

"She is a beauty," said John, seriously and simply.

I thought at the time that it was an odd, old-fashioned phrase, but it turned out to be strictly and literally true. Deborah Franklin was beautiful in the grand, classic manner. She didn't look in the least like a film star or a model. She had never been a deb, which was just as well, for she would have made the other debs look more than ordinarily silly. I suppose her vital statistics were in order, but looking at her you forgot about them. It was the sheer beauty of her face that took your breath away.

With looks like that, it would be asking too much to expect anything startling in the way of brains, and I found Deborah, though amiable, a trifle dull. She was of course well aware of her extraordinary good looks, and was perfectly prepared to discuss them, without conceit, just as a man seven feet high might talk about the advantages and inconveniences of being tall.

Most of our party were old friends of the Franklins, who took Deborah for granted as a local phenomenon, but among them was

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a newcomer, a young man with a beard named Aubrey Melcombe, who had lately taken charge of the local museum. As soon as he set eyes on Deborah, he said:

"We have never met before, but your face, of course, is perfectly familiar."

Deborah had evidently heard that one before.

"I never give sittings to photographers," she said, "but people will snap me in the street. It's such a nuisance."

"Photographs!" said Aubrey. "I mean your portrait—the one that was painted four hundred years ago. Has nobody ever told you that you are the living image of the Warbeck Titian?"

"I've never heard of the Warbeck Titian," said Deborah, which was rather letting the side down, for Warbeck Hall is near Markhampton and its pictures are famous, though of course only visitors go to see them.

"Truly," said Aubrey, "I dwell among the Philistines. But you shall judge for yourself. Lord Warbeck is lending the Titian to an exhibition in aid of the Cathedral Fund which we are organizing in the spring. I'll send you a ticket for the opening."

Then he went off to dance with Rosamund Clegg, his assistant at the museum. She had a face which didn't distract you for one moment from her vital statistics, and was said to be his fiancée.

I did not care much for Aubrey, or for his young woman, but I had to admit that they knew their job when I came to the opening of the exhibition a few months later. They had gathered in treasures of every sort from all over the county and had arranged them admirably. The jewel of the show was, of course, the great Titian. It had a wall to itself at the end of the room and I was looking at it when Deborah came in.

The likeness was fantastic. Lord Warbeck had never had his paintings cleaned, so that Titian's flesh tints were golden and carmine, in vivid contrast to Deborah's pink and white. But apart from that, the face behind the glass might have been her mirror image. By a happy chance Deborah had chosen to wear a very plain black dress which matched up well to the portrait's somber garb. She stood there motionless and silent, gazing steadily at her centuries' old likeness. I could not help wondering what she felt.

A pressman's camera flashed and clicked. First one visitor and then another noticed the resemblance and presently the rest of the gallery was deserted. Everyone was crowding round the Titian to stare from the painted face to the real one, then back again. The only clear space was round Deborah herself. People were maneuvering and jostling each other to get a good view of her profile, without losing sight

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of the Titian, which fortunately was in profile also. It must have been horribly embarrassing for Deborah, one would have thought, but she never seemed to notice them. She went on peering into the picture, utterly absorbed, for what seemed a very long time. Then she turned round and walked quickly out of the building. As she passed me, I saw that she was crying—a surprising display of emotion in one normally so calm.

About ten minutes later Aubrey discovered that two Degas statuettes were missing from a stand opposite the Titian. They were small objects but very valuable. The police were sent for and there was a considerable fuss, but nothing was found—not a clue. I left as soon as I could and went to the Franklins'. Deborah was in.

"Have you got the statuettes?" I asked.

She took them out of her handbag.

"How did you guess?"

"It seemed to me that your reception in front of the Titian was a put-up show," I explained. "It distracted attention from everything else in the room while the theft took place."

"Yes," said Deborah reflectively. "Aubrey arranged it very cleverly, didn't he? He thought of everything. He even helped me choose this dress to go with the one in the picture, you know."

"And the press photographer? He was involved in the plot too?

"Oh, yes. Aubrey arranged for someone to be there to photograph me. He thought it would help to collect a crowd. Not that I usually need that sort of thing to make people stop and look at me, of course."

Her coolness was astonishing. If her tone betrayed a hint of bitterness at the failure of the scheme, there was not a trace of remorse. The serene beauty of her face was as unruffled as ever. Even with the damning evidence of the statuettes in front of me, I found it hard to believe that I was talking to a common thief.

"It was a very cleverly concocted plan altogether," I said. "You and Aubrey must have put a lot of work into it. I had no idea that you were such friends."

I had spoken somewhat harshly, and for once I seemed to have made some impression on her maddening calm. There was a flush on her cheeks as she replied:

"Oh, yes, I've been seeing a good deal of him lately. Ever since the Hunt Ball, in fact."

After that there didn't seem to be much more to say. The picture was fairly complete in my mind, though why such a magnificent creature as Deborah should have fallen for a young pipsqueak like Aubrey was something that puzzled me tremendously.

"There's one thing I don't quite understand," I said finally. "People

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were surrounding you and staring at you up to the moment you left the gallery. How did Aubrey manage to pass the statuette to you without anyone seeing?"

This time there was no doubt that I had roused her out of her quiescence. She turned on me in a fury of surprise and indignation.

"Pass the statuette to *me*?" she repeated. "Good God! Are you suggesting that *I* helped Aubrey steal them?"

She looked like an angry goddess, and was about as alarming.

"But—but" I stammered, "but if you didn't, who did?"

"Rosamund Clegg, of course. Aubrey gave them to her while all the shindy was going on in front of the Titian. She simply put them in her bag and walked out. I'd only just got them back from her when you came in."

"Rosamund!" It was my turn to be surprised. "Then the whole thing was a put-up job between them?"

"Yes. She made no bones about it. They wanted to get married and hadn't any money, and she knew a dealer who would give a high price for things like these with no questions asked and there you are."

"Then how did you come into it?" I asked.

Deborah's face underwent a subtle change. For a moment I could see what she would look like when she was an old woman—still like a classical goddess, but a goddess aware of the follies of mankind, and a little weary of them.

"Aubrey said that if I posed in front of the Titian it would be wonderful publicity for the exhibition—and of course I fell for it." She laughed mirthlessly. "I've only just remembered. When Aubrey wanted to make fun of me he used to say I'd make a wonderful cover girl. That's just what I was—a cover girl for him and Rosamund."

She picked up the statuettes.

"These will have to go back to the gallery, I suppose," she said. "Can it be done without too much fuss? It's silly of me, I know, but I'd rather they didn't prosecute Aubrey."

I made sympathetic noises.

"It was Rosamund's idea in the first place," she went on. "I'm sure of that. Aubrey hasn't the wits to think up anything so clever."

"It was clever enough," I said. "But you saw through it at once. How was that?"

Deborah smiled rather wryly.

"I'm not clever," she said. "But that old dark picture with the glass on it made a perfect mirror. Aubrey told me to stand in front of it, so I did. But I'm not interested in art, you know. I was looking at myself. And of course I couldn't help seeing in the 'mirror' what was happening behind me . . ."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JAMES RONALD**

TITLE: ***A Tired Heart***

TYPE: Arson Investigation

DETECTIVE: George Benson

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *They said of Sam Abrams, the furrier, that it wasn't natural for him to be like a bridegroom after forty years of marriage. But did Sam love his sick wife enough to become a criminal and risk prison?*

EVERYONE IN THE FUR TRADE KNEW Sam Abrams. A kindly, hard-working soul with a round, beaming face and eyes that twinkled behind old-fashioned spectacles. You couldn't help liking him.

The thing is, he was just a bit more human than it pays to be. In furs, it's dog eat dog. So no one was surprised when word got around that Sam was only one hop and a jump from bankruptcy.

At the same time, the family doctor and two consultants warned him that the only hope for his wife was a long stay in a warm climate.

Sam's deep love for his wife was a joke to some of his acquaintances.

It wasn't natural, they said, to be like a bridegroom after forty years of marriage. But there it was. If it would have helped her he would have cut off one of his arms. His face became haggard. He shrank into himself until you'd have thought he was wearing the cast-off clothing of a larger man. His thoughts ran round in his head like small trapped animals in a cage.

Only George Benson knew quite how close Sam was to the wall. It was his business to know. Benson was an investigator for an insurance company that specialized in

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covering fur warehouses against such hazards as fire and theft. As a matter of fact, wherever Benson looked, he saw fraud. That was his business, too.

They used to say admiringly that Benson would send up his own grandmother. But they would admit he wasn't mean all the way through. He'd smuggle in little comforts to the old lady on visiting days—after he put her behind bars.

One chilly dawn the telephone on Benson's night table started ringing. He was wide-awake in seconds. Picking up the phone, he spoke into it in a subdued murmur. His face was expressionless. He began to put on his clothes in the dark.

His wife stirred and raised a drowsy head.

"What is it now?"

"Sam Abrams has set his warehouse on fire," said Benson, sitting on the bed to tie his shoes.

"How do you know it's arson? It could be an accident."

"When a man's desperate for cash and his warehouse that's insured for fifty thousand dollars goes up in flames, believe me, it's no accident."

"You've always said you liked Sam Abrams."

"Sam's all right."

"He's had a lot of trouble."

"I know."

"Couldn't you—go a little easy on him?"

"It isn't my job to go easy on arsonists. It's my job to put them in jail."

A stiff breeze was blowing. When Benson arrived, the firemen were already busy trying to save the neighboring buildings. He stood across the street with his hands in his raincoat pockets and watched inner partitions and floors crashing down inside the blazing warehouse.

There were no dwellings on that street but the sidewalk was thronged with men and women clad in odd garments snatched up in a hurry, all craning their necks and gaping, the way people do at a fire. Spotting a mutual acquaintance, Benson asked if he had seen Abrams.

"Sam's out of town," said the man, without taking his eyes from the leaping flames. "He went to St. Louis on yesterday afternoon's train."

It was what Benson had expected. When a man burns his property to collect the insurance he usually takes care to arrange an alibi. A slow fuse or some similar device touches off the blaze while the arsonist is perhaps hundreds of miles away.

Over the years ingenious criminal minds have worked out dozens of ways to do this. Many of them are as simple as a telephone call. An experienced investigator can usually determine the exact means employed. Otherwise, there would be a lot more successful incendiary fires.

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In an hour nothing was left of the warehouse except four blackened walls that were roofless to the sky and a cellar that was flooded with sooty water.

By midday the salvage men were moving in to mop up. Benson went with them. They groaned when they saw him. They knew the way he poked, pried, niggled. It meant working with a sieve instead of a shovel—slow, meticulous, finicking, and incredibly dirty work.

Benson wanted every hole and corner explored, every fragment scrutinized, every ash sifted. He could not have said exactly what he was looking for. He was simply going to keep on looking until he found something. With a simple soul like Sam Abrams he didn't expect anything particularly ingenious.

He was groping in the cellar, soaked in filth to his knees, when he heard an exclamation from a man a few yards away.

"What is it?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know. Some kind of a box. It was under some rubbish, over there in the corner."

Benson took the squarish object in his hands, turning it this way and that. The outer casing was blackened and warped. Heat and damp had damaged the intricate mechanism inside. What was it? He didn't know, he had never seen anything like it before. The boys in the laboratory would have to identify it.

The foreman of the crew waded through ooze to his side.

"That what you were looking for? What is it?"

"I don't know." Benson looked grim. "All I know is, it's going to put Sam Abrams behind bars for about five years."

But no one at the laboratory could identify the object offhand. They promised him a report later in the day. Meanwhile, Benson went down to the station and met the train from St. Louis. As he had expected, he saw Sam Abrams, looking rather pale, alighting from a Pullman car.

Joining the furrier, Benson walked at his elbow.

"Quite a blaze, Sam. It gutted the place."

"I heard. My brother-in-law sent me a wire."

Benson shook his head gloomily. "You shouldn't have done it, Sam. You ought to have known you'd never get away with it."

The furrier halted and looked him in the face. Benson had to give the little man credit for nerve.

"You think I burned my own warehouse?"

"I know it."

"You can prove it, maybe?"

"When the time comes."

"When the time comes, you know where to find me. I've got to get home to my wife. She hasn't been well. She worries, you know."

"Go on home, Sam. I'll be seeing you."

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It would have startled Benson's associates to see the look of sympathy on Benson's face as he watched the little man plodding to a taxi. What Sam had done he had done out of love for his ailing wife. It seemed a shame to send him to prison for it.

No, he wasn't turning soft. He was going to do everything in his power to make Sam pay for his crime. But still, it did seem a pity.

"All right," said Benson. "What is it? How did it work?"

The laboratory technician rose from a workbench strewn with bits and pieces and regarded the investigator owlishly.

"It's a Geiger counter."

Benson stared. "A Geiger counter?"

"You read the papers, don't you? It's for detecting radioactivity."

"I've heard about that. How do you use one to start a fire?"

The technician looked blank. "I don't know."

"It's your job to know. What do we pay you for?"

"If I could answer every fool question, you'd be paying me a lot more. As it is, I can't even guess how you'd start a fire with a Geiger counter. I don't believe it *can* be done."

"Abrams found a way."

"Maybe Abrams is a genius. You'd better dig up another genius to figure it out."

Under the pressure of Benson's insistence the head of the laboratory took over. Borrowing a workable Geiger counter from the physics department of a university, he submitted it to every test he could think of. For the most part he had to do his work with Benson breathing on his neck.

By an odd coincidence, Sam's books and records had not been destroyed in the fire. He had been working on them at home with his brother-in-law, an accountant, so the figures for his claim were readily available. In a week the claim—for $50,000—was submitted to the head office.

By this time the whole laboratory staff was puzzling over Geiger counters every working hour. None of them could suggest how you might use one to fry an egg, far less to start a fire.

One morning Benson's boss called him in.

"What are we going to do about this claim from Sam Abrams?"

"Stall him. Play for time. I know Sam set the fire. All I've got to do is find out how."

"How near are you to doing that?"

"No nearer than I was in the first place," admitted Benson with something like a snarl.

He went to consult a leading authority—a gray-haired gentleman, retired and living in comfort on the proceeds from fires he personally had set during his "professional" career. Known to have mas-

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terminded many of the most profitable blazes of two decades, he was so good at his job that he had only served one term in prison.

The expert examined the Geiger counter with interest. He put it through its paces. He took it to pieces. He put it together again. He tried this, that, the next thing. He drew exhaustive diagrams. He tore them up.

He began rumpling his hair and chewing his underlip. He wasn't going to be excelled in ingenuity by a mere amateur. For fourteen hours he kept nagging and fretting over the problem while Benson sustained him with pots of strong black coffee. Then the expert's wife put her foot down. She said she didn't want him cutting out paper dolls for the rest of his life.

Benson wired the factory that made the device. HOW WOULD YOU START A FIRE WITH A GEIGER COUNTER?

The factory wired back. IF YOU FIND OUT PLEASE TELL US.

In the middle of the night a poke in the ribs brought Benson out of a wild dream. He sat up in bed. His wife switched on the light.

"Another nightmare, George? The fourth in a week. You're killing yourself."

He got out of bed and lit a cigarette. He stared at the match until it almost burned his fingers. He knew the whole business was getting on his nerves. Only the previous day he had shouted at his small son. A Cub Scout, the lad had innocently asked his father how you light a fire by rubbing sticks together.

In pajamas and bare feet he paced the floor.

"Maybe you could— No, I guess you couldn't. The answer must be simple. Too simple for the experts. But—how? How? How?"

"George Benson," said his wife, "you come straight back to bed this instant."

No insurance firm can afford to get a reputation for being dilatory in settling claims. A month had passed. Benson was no nearer a solution. The company sent Sam Abrams a check for $50,000.

A few days later Sam took his wife to Florida. She traveled with a registered nurse and every conceivable comfort.

Benson's nails were chewed to the quick. It was now commonplace for him to lapse into absent-mindedness. In the middle of an investigation, even in the middle of a sentence, he would falter and look blank. He would stare abstractedly into distance.

He kept a Geiger counter in his office—his wife refused to have it in the house—and fiddled with it intermittently, like a boy with an Erector set.

"Forget it, George," urged his boss.

"Forget it, George," pleaded his wife.

How could he forget it? He

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knew he would never rest until his question was answered . . .

After two years Sam Abrams came home. There was nothing to keep him in Florida any longer. Sadie, his wife, was gone. There was a gentle smile on his face when he spoke of her passing.

"She had two good years," he told his friends. "Wonderful years. Happy years. No woman ever had it easier at the end of her life than my Sadie."

You could see that it wouldn't be long before he followed her. Like the old soldier in the song, Sam was fading away. He did very little in the time that was left to him. Mostly he wandered without haste through familiar streets he had known since boyhood, as if he were saying goodbye to them.

His doctor said it was a case of a tired heart. Well, that made sense. When a man uses his heart more than other men, naturally it gets tired.

A week before he died Sam took to his bed, and the day after his last illness started, the insurance company received an envelope containing Sam's check for $14,206.53.

Benson went to see Sam. He found him lying against the pillows, pale and limp, but with a frail smile of welcome for an old acquaintance.

"We got the check, Sam."

"It was all that was left, Mr. Benson—to the penny. I kept records."

"I'm sorry to see you like this."

"Don't be sorry," said the dying man. "I feel fine. A little tired, maybe. The way you get just before quitting time at the end of a long day."

"About the fire," said Benson apologetically.

"I was sorry to put it over on the company," said Sam, "but the way things were—"

"Sure, I know, Sam. But how?"

"Well, I knew I couldn't fool a smart man like you, Mr. Benson. I knew you'd keep poking into the ruins until you came up with something. You know me—I've never been bright in the head. All I could think of was a candle standing up in a box of shavings. So that's what I used."

"But—the Geiger counter. Where did that come in?"

"I knew you'd be suspicious, Mr. Benson. So I left you something to be suspicious about."

"A red herring," said Benson, almost choking on the words. "A blasted red herring!"

"That's right, Mr. Benson," said Sam gently.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

TITLE: *To Be Found and Read*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Marriage and murder—with a new twist, especially in the final paragraph . . . the "different" kind of story we have come to expect from an old EQMM favorite.*

I AM A MAN WHO LIKES TO PLAN ahead and know what I am going to do next. This was going to be a crowded day, and I had every minute of it mapped out. At eleven I had a legal errand to do for Ed Porter up in the country. By two I had to be back in the city for my own wedding. I had just time to get both dates in.

The road I was traveling on will, I imagine, be just another suburb before very long; but right now there were still stretches of open country left in it—not farms, but woods and brooks, and maybe back out of sight somebody's week-end shack.

It was in one of those stretches that I saw the old man waiting at the edge of the road, holding on to a tree so as to stand up.

He was a shocking sight. He could just about make it. His face was bloodless, his thin white hair tousled, his eyes staring. His jaw kept wobbling up and down as he tried to call out. Not many cars were passing, that time of day; there was nothing in sight before or behind me.

I don't pick up hitch-hikers, and certainly not on a day like this. But this old man was different. Something had to be done about him. So I stopped.

He tried to move toward me, and clutched the tree again to keep from

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falling down. I got out of the car and went to him.

"Hospital," he gasped.

I wasn't going near any hospital, and I had no time to detour. But I couldn't just leave him there. I thought it over for a minute, and then I half carried him to the car and propped him up in the back seat.

I thought fast. If I made all possible speed and there were no traffic blocks, I'd have time to deposit him with Ed Porter and yet get to the City Hall on time. Ed would know what to do with him. I looked back after we'd gone three or four miles.

Only a few cars had passed me going in the opposite direction; I'd overtaken none and none had overtaken me, going in my direction. We'd reached another stretch of open country, half a mile before the junction with the highway.

"I'll have to take you to the city," I said. "I haven't time to go anywhere off the road."

He didn't answer; he was leaning back and his eyes were closed.

Something told me I'd better draw up at the side of the road. There was a thick clump of trees there, with a low, sagging wire fence hemming them in. I got out, walked back, and opened the door.

He was dead.

I glanced up and down the road. I was lucky—at that moment no one was in sight. But I had to act quickly.

I couldn't drive up to the City Hall with a corpse in my car as a wedding present to Bonnie. I couldn't take a chance with it on the highway, with occasional stop signals and some snoopy driver in the next lane—let alone stopping by at Ed Porter's place as I'd intended and letting him handle it. He'd understand why I was dumping the old man on him alive, but I'd be in a spot trying to explain why I was handing him a dead body to dispose of.

I took one more look around, then lifted the old man out. He was light and easy to carry. No blood anywhere—if he'd been bleeding, it was inside of him.

I stepped over the wire fence and went back ten feet or so inside the clump of trees. I put him down where he wouldn't show, got back to my car, and beat it away from there.

Not a car had passed, and I had just time now to make it to where Bonnie was waiting for me.

But I had plenty of time for thinking on the way.

Sometimes, to make it fancy, I told myself that there were two of me—two Dale Hardens. One was the guy who had come up the hard way, had made it somehow through college and law school, had done my army service without a blot on my record or a scratch on my skin, had a respectable office in a downtown building, and was going to marry Bonnie at last.

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The other was Ed Porter's Man Friday.

There had never been anybody for me but Bonnie, since our high school days. Bonnie was all I wanted, and Bonnie was the kind of person I wanted to be—maybe the kind I'd been meant to be. One thing was sure—she was never going to find out my connection with Ed Porter if I could possibly help it.

I met Porter in the army. That's all I'm going to say about how we got together. I got into it gradually, and by the time I realized what it was all about I was in too deep to get out. I was his lawyer, and then again I wasn't. If he ever got into trouble, which was unlikely with his know-how and his luck, I wouldn't be his attorney of record; he was the first one to say that, and I was glad to agree. I wouldn't have been good enough, to begin with.

I'd never fooled myself. I'm no big brain. I just squeezed through law school and my name was next to last on the passing list in the bar examinations. My practice consisted mostly of minor damage suits and uncontested divorce cases—just about enough to keep a part-time secretary busy. Where the real money came from—the money to own a decent car, to rent and furnish the apartment in a good neighborhood for Bonnie and me to live in, to be able now to provide for Bonnie properly—all that came from Ed Porter. And where *his* money came from I knew very well, but I'd rather not think about it.

What it amounted to by now was that I was Ed Porter's combination errand boy, pay-off man, thinker-upper of smart legal twists, alibi-concocter, and front man when he didn't want to appear himself. He depended on me to keep him out of jams, and I got my share of the loot.

That was why I *had* to pick up the old man and take him with me. It was incredible that he should be there instead of where he was supposed to be. But if he could be standing by the side of the road half an hour after I'd got Gleason's report, then anything might have happened. He might have been able to talk—he was always one to run off at the mouth, that's why he was where he was. I couldn't let another driver pick him up; it was sheer Porter luck that nobody had seen him before I passed by.

Up to now I'd never done anything technically illegal, unless you count being a minor accessory. I never knew the details of any of Ed's operations before this one, and I didn't want to know—though naturally I had a pretty good idea of the general set-up. His associates didn't even know me by sight, though I'd had a look at all of them.

But now I had crossed the line, and on my own. I'm not even a good enough lawyer to know just what

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the charge or the penalty is for illegal disposal of a dead body, if you get caught at it. It might be only a misdemeanor, for all I know. But the investigation would turn up a few other things that would ruin me and disbar me, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that it would wreck me with Bonnie.

If I'd had time to think, I might have handled the situation differently. But I was horrified and incredulous, besides being in a tearing hurry. And this whole affair had given me a terrific jolt already. It was the first time in my tie-up with Porter that I'd been involved knowingly in murder.

But they were not going to pin the old man's body on me. There was no way to find out who had left him in that clump of trees—I'd made sure there was nobody in sight. Nobody but Porter and Gleason knew I was in that neighborhood at all that morning, and they wouldn't tell. I had probably run a lot closer risks in the past and got away with them. It was only my own guilty conscience that gave me that hollow feeling in my stomach.

I made it to the City Hall on time. I got there three minutes after Bonnie.

We couldn't have much of a honeymoon; I had to stay close by and in touch. I'd made reservations for two weeks at a quiet, well-run place I knew about, 100 miles down the coast. Only Ed Porter knew where I was; he had to know, of course.

For the first time in four years I forgot everything in the world except Bonnie.

I had two days. Then the wire came.

THE CAT HAS HAD NINE KITTENS. LOVE. EDNA.

Edna was Ed. And if that cat had had kittens, I couldn't waste any time. I'd taken the telegram to the john to read, so I could flush it down.

"Oh, Dale, bad news?" Bonnie cried at sight of my face.

"Just business. I thought I had everything arranged to leave us free for two weeks, but they've called up a case of mine unexpectedly. I'll have to go up right away."

"Never mind, the apartment's ready and we'll just move in earlier. I'll go and pack."

"No, no, darling, nothing like that. I'll be back by tomorrow. I just hate to leave you here one night by yourself."

Bonnie's bright face clouded.

"But I want to be with you, Dale. I'll ride up with you and we can stay at a hotel tonight. We can keep our room here."

I knew this sort of thing was going to come up sooner or later, only I'd hoped it wouldn't be so soon. No telling what I was going to find; I wanted Bonnie safe and sound and away from it. I had a hard time persuading her I'd be too

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busy with my client to know when we could be together for even a minute up there. If Bonnie had been the jealous type I couldn't have managed it. But then she wouldn't have been Bonnie.

I won out, and I kissed her goodbye—oh, God, I thought, if it only *is* till tomorrow! I'd left her enough money, anyway, if anything went wrong—all this in about ten minutes after I'd got Ed's wire.

He never came to my office, of course. I met him where I always did.

"The thing's impossible!" he burst out as soon as I came in. "How could it have happened? And what do you know about it?"

"Tell me," I said. "I haven't seen a paper or looked at a TV set for two days."

"I forgot," he smirked. "I guess you've had other things on your mind. Congratulations."

"Never mind my private life. What's the trouble?"

"Here it is, then, and we've got to do something quick, or we're in the soup. You know the set-up—Gleason was to do his job and contact you at eleven. He did, didn't he?—or you'd have let me know."

"Of course he did. I paid him and saw him off to the airport."

"Well, if he told you he did the job, he did it. I've hired him before—never mind about that, it was nothing you knew about—and he knows his business. Tom Nary was due to be found in his shack with the gun in his hand and his own prints on it—no note, but an obvious suicide. You worked that out yourself."

I couldn't keep him from seeing my shudder.

"If Frank was right and old Tom was going to spill—" I began.

"Cut the excuses. I never saw a man as squeamish as you are. If it hadn't been necessary it wouldn't have been done. Only—Nary *wasn't* found in his shack with the gun in his hand. He was found about four miles from it, under some trees—and no gun. How the hell he got there I'll never know!"

I knew, but it was no time to explain.

"Some kids hunting squirrels found him. Worst of all, it was over the county line. They've got a tough sheriff in that county. That wouldn't matter, if he'd escaped some way from Gleason and for some crazy reason wandered down there and dropped dead of heart failure. But when they autopsied him they found a bullet hole in his heart."

"That's impossible!" I exclaimed. "If you shoot a man through the heart he's dead."

"Sure. I'd have thought so too. But I've been checking with a doc. It's something I don't understand, about clogging something and then having it come loose. Seems that people have lived for hours after being hit dead-center—one or two have even recovered. What I figure,

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when Gleason drilled him he collapsed, and naturally Gleason thought he was dead. He ought to've made sure, but who could imagine anything else? He probably just put the gun in Nary's hand and beat it before anybody heard the shot—not that there was likely to be anybody within hearing distance." Ed snorted. "Then the old man must have come to and managed somehow to get himself off the floor and out of the house. But how he got four miles down the road is beyond me. He couldn't have walked that far, not in his shape, and if anybody picked him up he'd have died in the car. It was moving around that must have dislodged the bullet, the doc said, and then he died of internal hemorrhage."

I'd had time by then to get my wits together.

"Well, so what?" I asked. "They found him somewhere else, but he was just as dead."

"I'll tell you so what. First, this time he wasn't a suicide—no weapon. It was murder. Second, haven't you forgotten something? Frank was scheduled to go to the shack about one o'clock and discover his old man. And he was to take a witness along with him—the same guy who'd been providing his alibi since nine that morning. He did it all according to schedule. Only, he was so flabbergasted when he found the shack empty that he picked up the gun off the floor where the old man must have dropped it, and now his prints are on it too."

"And?"

"And the autopsy surgeon down where the body was found gave the time of death as not more than two hours before. It was 3:30 p.m. when the kids found him. Frank has no alibi after one o'clock. Get it now, counselor? The logical suspect in a murder is the nearest of kin—wife, husband, brother, son. The cops are looking for Frank Nary right now."

"Will he talk?"

"Will a canary sing? A guy that would turn in his own father, put the finger on him and soft-soap him into going up there to the shack alone for a private confab, with Gleason due to arrive instead of Frank—do you think he'd keep his mouth shut about *us* when it was a question of saving his own dirty hide? Even if it didn't do him any good himself, he'd spill his guts out of pure meanness."

I didn't like that "us." My mind flew to Bonnie, waiting trustfully for me to come back in the morning.

"I told you long ago," I burst out, "that they were poison—Tom and Frank Nary both. I warned you to get rid of them."

"I've needed Frank; he's a skunk but he's a good worker and I couldn't get along without him. The old man came with the deal. How was I to know that the old

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fool would get cold feet and warn Frank he was going to the Feds? There was only one thing to do then, and Frank knew it—rat though it made him—and I knew it, and you knew it. It was your own scheme—do I have to remind you of that?"

He didn't. It had seemed foolproof, with Gleason safely back in Chicago again.

"Where is Frank now?" I asked.

"I've got him hidden. But I can't hide him forever. You've got to find a way to get us out of this."

I'd have given a million dollars that minute, if I'd had it, to turn the clock back just four years. Those first bits of legal advice to an old buddy, the game it had been to think up clever dodges for an admiring client dizzyingly free with his money—I'd never dreamed they would lead up to the day when Dale Harden would be accessory to a murder. A week ago, all I had thought about was that now Bonnie and I could be married.

Yes, I had to get us out of this, all right. I swore to myself that once this mess was over, I'd break with Ed Porter for good—though I don't know what I expected to live on if I did. Only let me find a way out, no matter what it involved—a way that would make sure that Bonnie would never know.

For a second I thought of telling Porter the truth, letting him know how Tom Nary came to be found in that clump of trees. He would be wild, but that didn't matter. Only, what then? It would prove that Nary had been dying, and hence must have been shot before noon, when Frank Nary's alibi still held—but who was going to believe that a man would shoot himself, change his mind, stagger out to the road, be picked up, and die in the car of some passing stranger? The story would sound like a fairy tale to the cops, and if Frank got off the hook, they wouldn't stop till they had found out about everybody else Tom Nary had known. That meant Ed—and Ed meant me.

Besides, it would mean my confessing that I'd dumped the body, and there we were back on the same merry-go-round again.

"There's only one thing we *can* do," I said slowly. "That's for Frank to kill himself too. They had a family quarrel, and he shot his father. He can't take it any more, so he's shooting himself and leaving a note to clear the thing up."

"Sure, that sounds just like Frank," Porter sneered. "I just go out to where he's hiding and say to him, 'Look, Frankie boy, our little scheme went wrong and the heat's on Harden and me now, so will you just do us a little favor and write a confession and bump yourself off like a good fellow?'"

"Oh, be your age, Ed. You know what I mean."

"*I'm* not going to do it," he said hastily. "I never killed a man in my life."

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No, he just hired it done by a professional.

"And it's not going to be done where he is now," he added. "That place can be tied up to me."

"Well, *I'm* not going to do your dirty work for you," I said, enumerating every word. "Can't you get Gleason back in a hurry?"

"I can but I won't. I don't trust him *that* much. And his life wouldn't be worth a nickel if he made too many trips here with somebody found dead right after each one of them—he's too smart to take jobs too often in the same place."

"Don't you know anybody else?"

"No, I don't. Who do you think I am—Dillinger?"

He should have said Al Capone: Dillinger did his own killing.

". . . I could get his handwriting copied all right, though," Porter was saying meditatively. "Well enough so no expert would know the difference—I've got plenty of samples to work from. And he could have something put in his coffee at night to make him dopey, so he could be moved easy. But whatever we do, we've got to do it right away."

"Give me a couple of hours," I said. "I'll work something out."

I drove downtown to my office. There was nobody there; I'd given my part-time secretary two weeks off, to coincide with my honeymoon.

As soon as I got the door shut I phoned Bonnie. I had nothing to say to her; I just wanted to hear her voice.

"Are you all right, honey?" She sounded anxious.

"Sure I'm all right, except that I'm not down there with you."

"Well, listen: if you're not here by noon tomorrow I'm taking the afternoon train up, I want to be with you. Who ever heard of a bride spending the honeymoon by herself?"

I couldn't argue. I kept wondering if the next time I saw her it would be across a table with a guard listening in.

"I love you so much, Bonnie."

"Me too, Dale."

She hung up. I sat there thinking. The whole nasty business had to be taken care of at once. If there was going to be trouble, I wanted Bonnie far, far away from it.

I had known from the beginning that I was elected. I put on my hat and went back to Ed.

Frank Nary was hiding out in a cottage at the end of town. Bill Holmgren, a big lunk with a lard brain who did errands for Porter involving no mental effort, was looking after him and keeping an eye on him. Neither of them knew me by sight, but I'd seen both of them.

I got there after dark. In my pocket was the letter Porter had had made for me—Frank Nary's suicide note. I planned to use his own gun on him, but I had one of

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my own as a preliminary persuader.

Ed had let them know I was coming. The ostensible idea was that I was to take him to another, safer hiding place. But the little rat was suspicious and jumpy.

"Come on, fellow, let's have a cup of hot coffee to brace us up before we get going," I said, once he was satisfied I was who Ed said I was. Holmgren was supposed to have doped his coffee already, but apparently he hadn't had the sense to do it before I got there.

"I don't want any coffee," Nary said sullenly.

"Okay, then let's have a drink to start out on. I could use one myself. Got anything here, Holmgren?" I winked at Holmgren, to indicate the switch in orders, but he was too stupid to catch on. Well, if I couldn't get Nary sleepy and submissive, then I'd have to do it by force.

When we were finally on the road, he asked, "Where are you taking me? I was all right where I was."

"Porter didn't think so, and he ought to know. We're going out of town."

"Not—not to dad's shack?" He sounded scared.

"Certainly not—they'll have that staked out."

They would, at that; otherwise it would have been an ideal place—the criminal returning to the scene of his crime. I'd have taken him instead to the clump of trees where I'd dumped his old man's body, but the newspaper stories had made that a point of interest to the local yokels, so I couldn't take a chance on it.

"Why didn't you bring Bill along?" he brought up now. "I can't go out myself to buy stuff—Porter ought to know that."

"He knows it. There'll be somebody else where we're going."

I headed toward the coast. Driving down that way with Bonnie, I hadn't noticed much of the scenery, but I had seen a straggling fishing village that ought to do. I'd told Ed about it and he thought it would be just right.

I stopped the car on the edge of the settlement and put out the lights. Anybody who wasn't out fishing was asleep. It was after midnight.

"We walk from here," I told Nary.

He didn't make any protest and we started down a rough track to the beach.

"This is better than going through the town," I said. "We'll climb up again when we're opposite the place."

There was no moon, but we could see our way by starlight. The tide was low, the ocean far out. We walked where the incoming tide would wash away our footsteps later.

I'd hoped that by this time Nary would have been dopey enough for me to suggest a rest, but that was out. The strain was beginning to

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get me, with all the tough work yet to do; I was relieved when he himself suggested stopping a minute to take a breather. We plowed through thick sand and tangled beach grass where our footprints wouldn't show, and sat down with our backs against a shallow depression in the low sandstone hills that lined the shore.

"We got much farther to go?" he asked.

"Nearly there," I said.

It was very dark. It would be a good place.

I reached in my pocket. My hand came out halfway.

Suddenly there was a gun in my ribs.

"What's the big idea?" I sputtered.

"Hold still," Frank Nary said grimly. "Ed told me the whole thing. Give me that letter you've got in your breast-pocket."

I took it out with stiff fingers. He clicked his cigarette lighter with his left hand we watched it crumble to ash.

"Now," he said confidently, "I'll take out *my* letter. *You're* the guy that bumped off my old man, and now you can't face it—just married and all—so you're doing the Dutch and leaving a confession."

That double-crossing louse Ed Porter! He'd decided Frank Nary was more useful to him in the long run than I was. Probably he'd guessed I wanted out—wanted to get away from him and build up a new, decent life with my wife.

No wonder Nary's coffee hadn't been doped. I wondered if my drink had been. I wasn't even frightened—just awfully tired. But I wasn't going to let Porter get away with it.

"And just why was I supposed to kill your father?" I asked, trying desperately to keep my voice calm. The longer I could hold him there talking, the longer I'd have to figure a way out.

"Oh, we've got that all fixed. Dad had some letters your wife—your girl, she was then—wrote to another guy while you were overseas. You destroyed them when you shot Dad, but he'd given me photostatic copies I can produce. Ed's got the photostats all ready."

Something white-hot exploded inside me. It wasn't a bullet.

"You oughtn't to have mixed Bonnie in this," I said softly. "That was a mistake."

I suddenly reached backward with my left arm and caught his gun-hand before he could squeeze the trigger. My knee smashed sideways into his belly and took his breath. With his own gun I shot him three times. I made sure, better than Gleason had done; I took half his head off.

I hadn't time to go back to town and finish off my pal Ed Porter. This account's going to be found—I'll see to that—and he'll get his. It will hurt him a lot worse than just being killed.

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Oh, yes, I know my time is up—I'm done for. I can trust Ed Porter to see to it that I'm turned in to the police for Frank Nary's murder—and for his father's too. Those phony letters will be the clincher as a motive and Bonnie would be dragged into the mess.

Ed'll report that Frank Nary was his employee—in the legitimate end of his business, of course—that Nary had come to him with the story, and that he'd sent for me, his legal advisor, his old army buddy, his personal friend, to give me a chance to explain before he took Frank's information to the authorities.

I'd rushed out of his office when I heard the news—that's what Ed would say—and he couldn't catch up with me before it was too late, before I'd killed both Narys. I know exactly how Porter works—I ought to. Holmgren would be the properly coached witness and I wouldn't have a hope—not a glimmer of a hope . . .

I've holed up in my car at a lonely spot farther down the coast till I get this written, and till daylight comes. I'll reach the resort around nine, before any word can arrive there.

Because now, of course, I'll have to kill Bonnie too. There's no way any more to keep her from finding out the kind of man she married. And I'd rather see her dead than have her find out that.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**WILLIAM BRANDON**
TITLE:	***Breach of Promise***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Sam Ireland
LOCALES:	New York—and a bar in London
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Old Triveley had been a spectacular playboy in his time, and he knew every trick invented by a Follies or Scandals girl. So when his young and naive nephew got enmeshed ...*

MY FRIEND SAM IRELAND TOLD me this story at the bar of the Old Vic in London. The bar was crowded—the barmaid said it was always busiest on tragic nights, and this night's performance was *King Lear*—and a dark-haired girl, very beautiful in a white satin dress and a fur wrap, stepped on Ireland's foot and said, "Oh, I'm sorry." "Not at all," Ireland replied. They noticed each other's American accents and exchanged a smile; then the girl glanced at him again, a little startled, as if she might have recognized him as someone she used to know, but Ireland had already returned to his drink. She moved away, and I said, "She knew you."

"I know her better," Ireland murmured. "I once spent a week watching her."

I suggested that it must have been pleasant work, and asked him if the girl was a crook. Ireland is a cop, a special investigator much in demand by company directors who suspect their presidents of dipping into the till, and the like.

"Strictly speaking, yes," Ireland said.

I caught another glimpse of the girl across the crowded room. She was smiling up at a tall young man in evening clothes. She was a vision of loveliness. Maybe there's no relation between beauty and virtue, but it's an illusion that dies hard.

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Ireland sighed. "I know. I thought so too."

Then he told me the story . . .

There was in New York an exceedingly rich and violent old gentleman named Barnard Triveley who until the age of forty-odd had been a spectacular playboy—tabloids had been invented, it was said, to keep up with the sizzling series of Triveley breach-of-promise suits—but who afterward had retired from the playing fields of Broadway to devote himself to scrupulous deportment and to the making of money.

He had a young nephew named Henry who was faultlessly quiet and correct and well-behaved, and with the zeal of the reformed rake the old man meant to keep him that way. He ruled Henry with a discipline of steel and, remembering the subtle perils of champagne suppers on the New Amsterdam Roof, limited Henry's spending money to an allowance of twenty-five dollars a week, a sum Uncle Barnard had once considered a reasonable tip for a pretty hat-check girl.

Henry's pleasures were of necessity fairly simple. He belonged to a Camera Club and a Nature Walk Club, and took part in amateur theatricals at the YMCA. Now and then he went to the movies or to a lecture or concert with Mary Ellen Barnhouse, a sweet and friendly girl who also belonged to the Camera Club and the Nature Walk Club, and took part in amateur theatricals at the YWCA.

It came as something of a shock, therefore, when a model known as Normandie Calhoun sued Henry for $250,000 for breach of promise.

Uncle Barnard third-degreed Henry until he was satisfied he had all the facts, then sent for Sam Ireland. The Triveley lawyers had discovered that Normandie Calhoun and Mary Ellen Barnhouse were one and the same person, the Normandie Calhoun being a professional name she used in her work as a model. They had also learned that Henry had written letters to Mary Ellen that were perfect examples of indiscretion, tendering his heart and hand and expressing his affection in such explicit terms that they would have done credit to Uncle Barnard in his palmiest days.

Obviously, Uncle Barnard told Ireland, the whole thing was a plot. Normandie Calhoun, posing as the artless Mary Ellen, had won her way into Henry's confidence and taken advantage of his innocent and romantic nature. This sounded rather unlikely to Ireland—until he talked to Henry and found him as guileless and ingenuous as Uncle Barnard had claimed.

Henry was stricken by what Mary Ellen had done. He thought her lawyer must have forced her to it by some sort of blackmail. Henry had once met her lawyer, who was a young man and a personal friend of Mary Ellen's, and he had felt that Mary Ellen was uneasy in his presence. The fellow was rep-

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tilian, Henry said, and looked as if he might snap at flies when no one was looking. Henry wanted to beat his reptilian brains out, then go to join the French Foreign Legion, but Uncle Barnard was holding him prisoner under lock and key. Uncle Barnard had a vivid memory of his own first lawsuit, when he had shot the toupé off a distinguished attorney with a dueling pistol.

Henry admitted that he had asked Mary Ellen, in writing, to be his wife, but they had both understood this could not come about until he reached the age of thirty-one (Henry was then twenty-four) and came into his money, held for him until that time in a trust administered by Uncle Barnard. Mary Ellen had never objected to the idea of waiting, but unfortunately the idea of waiting was not made clear in any of Henry's letters. It was part of the game, Uncle Barnard pointed out, to lure the sucker into writing the exact phraseology that would stand up in court, and no doubt Mary Ellen's lawyer had been at her elbow throughout the whole luring process, checking phrases and calling the shots.

"The saddest feature of the whole dingdong thing," Uncle Barnard said to Ireland, "is that the boy didn't learn anything from my experience. However, I did. The only sure way to beat this racket is to prove that the girl has another boy friend—and, believe me, she always has another boy friend. That will be your job. Watch her until you get the goods."

Using Triveley money to make the arrangements, Ireland installed himself as the superintendent of Mary Ellen's apartment building, bugged her flat, set up an observation post in an adjacent empty apartment, and watched her with great care. He spoke to her a time or two in the lobby, and talked to her another time or two when she called him up to her apartment to fix this or that about the radiators or lights or gas. She was very pretty, with altogether charming ways, and Ireland almost fell in love with her himself.

She had stopped working for the time being—the publicity of the suit caused her to be ganged by press photographers whenever she went out on a job—and she stayed at home most of the time. No one came to see her except her lawyer, whose name was Braxton Lee. He was tall and thin and somewhat intense, but Ireland didn't notice that he looked particularly reptilian. He came to see Mary Ellen nearly every evening—to report on the progress of the case. Listening to their conversation and watching them through the peephole he had concealed in a wall-light fixture in the living room, Ireland realized very soon that Braxton had more than a professional interest in Mary Ellen. However, Mary Ellen didn't seem to be aware of it. Uncle Barnard, after listening to a tape recording

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of their talks, thought otherwise.

When Braxton said, "You're a good game girl," Uncle Barnard came alert and snapped, "What was he doing then?"

"Holding her hands," Ireland said.

"Ha!"

"He was at the door saying good night."

"Folderol. Did you hear his voice? Where the devil have you young squirts put in your time that you can't recognize endearments when you hear them?"

"Sometimes I wonder," Mary Ellen's voice said.

"Listen to the sob in her throat," the old man almost chortled. "She's sad because she's playing a double game. Gah, I can read them like a book. Certainly she's a nice girl. They're always nice girls. Any reason a nice girl should hate money? Thing you amateurs don't realize is that everyone is crooked at heart, whether they're nice or not. Given enough temptation—"

"You deserve to be happy," Braxton's voice said, "and when this is all over—"

"Yes, yes," Uncle Barnard said. "Go on, go on!"

"—I hope you'll find happiness, Mary Ellen."

"Thank you, Braxton. You're so kind."

"I want you to be happy more than I want anything else in the world, Mary Ellen."

There was a pause, and Uncle Barnard demanded, "Did he kiss her?"

"Not yet," Ireland said.

"I'll do anything for you, Mary Ellen," the young lawyer's voice went on, "you know that."

"Outright confession," Uncle Barnard snapped.

"And I hope—some time—well . . . Good night, Mary Ellen."

"Now?" Uncle Barnard asked, a little breathlessly.

"On the cheek," said Sam.

"Good night, Braxton." Mary Ellen's voice had throbbed.

Uncle Barnard said it was ridiculously plain that Braxton was Mary Ellen's real boy friend, although they were smart enough to be very circumspect. Ireland didn't think so. In fact, he didn't want to watch Mary Ellen any more, since it made him feel too much like a heel.

"I'll tell you how I know she isn't," Uncle Barnard said earnestly, "and I speak from wisdom. Because if she'd been on the level she could have had Henry plus more than a million dollars, which is what his trust fund amounts to, by simply waiting. But she didn't wait. Why? Because she doesn't want Henry. I can't blame the girl for that, but if she'd rather have this Braxton character she shouldn't get a hatful of Henry's money with him. Is that justice?"

Ireland suggested that Henry ask the girl to marry him instanter as a test of her good faith but the old man said that for one thing he

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wouldn't permit Henry to marry before thirty, and for another, of course she would grab him and get her hands on all his prospective wealth rather than the fraction she was now suing for.

To keep anything like this from happening at the last minute, Uncle Barnard was planning to send Henry off to Switzerland as soon as his passport could be obtained. He didn't think Henry had any further interest in Mary Ellen now, knowing what she really was, but Uncle Barnard had once been sued three times running by the same Scandals girl, and he knew from experience that it was best to take no chances whatever.

Anyway, Henry had a legitimate excuse for going to Switzerland—he had been trying for months to get Uncle Barnard to buy up some Swiss camera patents he thought would turn out to be a good business deal. Uncle Barnard had no intention of buying the patents, but going to Switzerland to discuss the matter would give Henry something to do.

When Ireland still wanted to resign the assignment, Uncle Barnard offered to double his fee and then said, as a special added inducement and sporting proposition, he would pay $5,000 extra for a photograph of Mary Ellen in her lover's arms. Ireland, obeying his normal instincts where money was concerned, decided to keep the job.

Henry's passport came through the next day, and Ireland got his photograph that same night, when after midnight Mary Ellen's lover came stealthily to her apartment to crush her in his arms, while she kissed him with hunger and enthusiasm . . .

The intermission was ending and people were going back into the theater.

I said, "Did he pay you the five thousand?"

"I tore the picture up," Ireland said, clearly ashamed of his sentimentalism.

"So she won her suit?"

"Uncle Barnard had always settled such cases out of court, when it was clear he was going to lose. He released enough of Henry's money to pay Mary Ellen a compromise settlement. She took it."

The girl was leaving the bar. I indicated the young man with her. "That would be Braxton?"

"No," Ireland said, "that's Henry. It was Henry I got in the photograph—he had sneaked out of his uncle's house to come and tell Mary Ellen goodbye. I'm afraid the whole thing was a conspiracy between Henry and Mary Ellen to force some of Henry's money out of the old man so Henry wouldn't have to wait seven more years for his independence—and of course it was highly illegal . . . They were married in Switzerland. It turned out the money she got was exactly the price of the camera patents. He's done very well with them, I hear."

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

For urbane, informed commentary on mystery novels new and old, you are urged to read W. B. Stevenson's DETECTIVE FICTION (Cambridge, 75¢). It's a small book (a brief essay and an annotated checklist of important authors and titles, many unfamiliar in America), but in quality it ranks with the critical surveys of Haycraft, Queen and Rodell.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ **DEPART THIS LIFE, *by E. X. Ferrars*** (Crime Club, $2.95)
Faultless formal detective story enriched by subtle shadings of character; fine specimen of modern British fusion.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ **LADY KILLER, *by Ed McBain*** (Permabooks, 25¢)
Twelve tight-packed hours of suspense as the 87th Precinct tries to avert murder threatened in a cryptic crank-letter.

☆ ☆ ☆ **THE AFFAIR OF THE EXOTIC DANCER, *by Ben Benson*** (Mill-Morrow, $3)
In alternate chapters Benson offers a firsthand study of the Mass. State Police and an astute analysis of the growth of a killer.

☆ ☆ ☆ **THE EVIL FRIENDSHIP, *by Vin Packer*** (Gold Medal, 35¢)
As the Parker-Hulme murder case (New Zealand, 1954) resembles Loeb-Leopold in sensational horror, this fictional treatment resembles COMPULSION in compassionate intelligence.

☆ ☆ ☆ **THE FACE OF THE TIGER, *by Ursula Curtiss*** (Dodd, Mead, $2.95)
All of the virtues and none of the vices of the feminine school of terror-romance-suspense.

☆ ☆ ☆ **THE NAME IS MALONE, *by Craig Rice*** (Pyramid, 35¢)
10 stories (half from EQMM) about rumpled, shrewd John J. Malone—uneven in plotting, but characteristically zany in charm.

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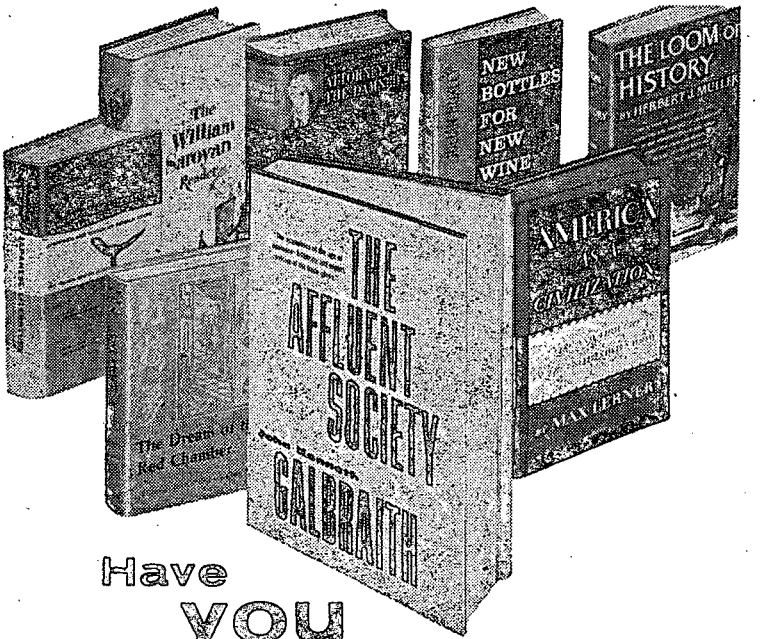

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT M. COATES**

TITLE: ***Rendezvous***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALES: New York, Pennsylvania, Florida

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Life (says the author) does imitate art—for though life is the source of art, art is more persuasive, its patterns more convincing..."The New Yorker" manner.*

CONVENTION AND TRADITION ARE stubborn things, and it is hard for anyone to circumvent them; indeed, it almost seems as if they had a life of their own, forcing even the most recalcitrant to obey them. Not all doctors wear beards nowadays, and few farmers chew straws, but there are marks to identify both these and other professions, to the point where one might almost think that each occupation imposes its own habits and mannerisms. (When I lived in Connecticut, for example, the most farmerish farmer I knew—even down to the seamed, weather-beaten face, the raw, bony wrists, and the nasal intonation—was a former insurance broker from Brooklyn; changing jobs, he had somehow changed attitudes, too, that was all.) This extends—as Fred Barclay, for one, discovered—to the criminal trades as well, and here it seems as if some really baneful influence was at work. For these are fields where conformity to a common pattern is a handicap, and dangerous—and yet who hasn't been struck by how often, in life as in the movies, the gangster betrays himself by his tight-belted topcoat and snap-brim hat, the pickpocket by his furtive alertness, and the robber by his burly assertiveness?

Is it simply the instinct for conformity that's at work here, so strongly that it overrides everything

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else? Or does the way of life carry its own identification, so that the thievingness of the thief, say, must reveal itself, no matter how hard the thief himself tries to conceal it? Fred Barclay, at any rate, tried to get outside the norm.

Barclay was, and had been for some years, the assistant manager of a Long Island branch of one of our larger city banks; and as such, in that curiously ambivalent way that characterizes some professions—particularly, of course, those which interest the criminal classes—he had had occasion to study both the principles of legitimate banking practice and (naturally, at second hand) the methods of the forgers, embezzlers, and others who would subvert them. Like the detective who makes it his business to learn the techniques of safeblowers, or the postal clerk who watches the "Wanted" posters tacked up in the postoffice lobby, Freddy Barclay read, with what might be called semiprofessional interest, the accounts of the usually brief careers of defaulting bank cashiers; and as so often occurs in such cases a feeling of inverted affinity developed. Long before the idea of taking part in such criminal activities ever entered his head, he had developed a highly critical attitude toward the way they were currently conducted, and when he did at last decide to take that dangerous step, he found the planning of his own course of action was surprisingly easy.

In a broad sense, his plan was to follow the exact opposite of the usual procedure, and he did introduce a number of innovations. For the benefit of those who may be contemplating a like career, it may be worth while describing his methods in detail. In the first place, it struck him, early in his investigations, that there was a tedious sameness about the places the embezzlers hit for. If it wasn't the Bahamas, it was either Miami or Atlantic City, and they went there usually in a bright-red convertible and accompanied by a blonde. Though Fred saw, or thought he saw, what influenced them in these choices of destination—all were tourist centers, and presumably uninquisitive about strangers—he was shrewd enough, too, to perceive how faulty such reasoning was. For it seemed to him that just because of this heavy turnover the police in such resorts must be especially well organized for surveillance, while the very fact that a man *was* a newcomer made whatever disguise he might assume more or less ineffective; strangers, in a sense, always go masked.

In the matter of disguise, too, he perceived that others had made a fatal error, in that they assumed it only *after* the act, and then so hastily that they were obviously uncomfortable in it. Fred's best stroke, perhaps, was that he decided to reverse that process. He would spend at least a full year at the bank in

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disguise—a disguise that would be gradually and carefully perfected—and then, after his getaway, revert to his normal personality.

The disguise consisted, for the most part, of little things, but they were all shrewdly calculated to confuse description of him later. His hair was beginning to gray a little, and he nipped that in the bud; in the end, by the most delicate and careful tinting, he managed to give his hair, normally black, just the faintest brownish tinge. His eyes were naturally rather full, and he developed a habit of squinting them, while from a conservative, and rather careless, dresser he changed, again very gradually, to an immaculate and — within the confines of banking custom — almost a flashy one.

At about the same time Fred began to "worry" about his weight, and, when a friend suggested golf he tried it—and soon developed a carefully sustained, very vocal enthusiasm for it. That, in turn, led to his joining a country club, and when once he got in with the crowd there, he "blossomed out" in a way that until his acquaintances got used to the change from the quiet, rather unsociable fellow he once had been, was something of a marvel to them. Being naturally parsimonious, and extremely sedentary, Fred used sometimes to groan at the cost of the entertaining he was now committed to, and groan still more when, at seven o'clock of a Sunday morning, he had to rout himself out of bed and appear, suitably energetic, to join an early foursome. By that time, too, he had bought a new car, a dark-green convertible, and was quite a figure in the social life of the community, and he worried a bit, at first, lest his new conviviality make the bank's officers worry a little about him.

But he found, to his own surprise, that if anything it increased his standing in the organization. For the truth was that the bank had got a bit stodgy in its methods; it had lost contact with the newer, more youthful elements in the town, and Fred, by his contacts with just these groups, began bringing in a number of new clients that it otherwise would have missed. He did his work well, too, through it all, for that also was part of his plan. He sought, instead of shirking, extra duties, until, by the time he was ready for his coup, he was practically in charge of the bank's New Accounts division; and as a good part of his time during the business day was taken up with luncheons, booster-club meetings, and so on, he fell more and more into the custom of doing his clerical work after hours—with, of course, the safe left open until he closed it himself, upon leaving.

He delayed a full year more, however, and meantime he managed to engineer a few more slight but important changes in his looks

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and his personality. He acquired a peculiarly abrupt, loud laugh, and a backslapping, jovial, man-to-man way of talking that went well with the reputation of being a real live wire that he had developed. And his athleticism, apparently, did result in reducing his girth by a noticeable number of inches—a fact which he pointed out proudly to friends, though he failed, of course, to add that a lightweight corset accounted for most of the reduction.

Fred had one bad moment in the course of all this, when a cousin of his whom he hadn't seen for five years came East on a motor trip and stopped for a visit. He took one look at the relative who combined golf, dancing, and late dinners with backbreaking work, and expressed amazement.

"What's got into you, Fred, anyway?" he demanded. "Here you're going on forty-five and now all of a sudden you come up with more energy than any other six men I know. You, who used to be so goldarned lazy!"

"Vitamins, I guess," Fred snapped, and made a mental note to avoid relatives, with their uncomfortably long memories, in the future.

Fred had a few bad moments, too, when, one Friday night in early July, he made the final, decisive gesture and—with some $43,000 in cash and $18,000 additional in negotiable bonds—absconded. For one thing, till then he hadn't quite realized how completely irrevocable that step was. Like the sea captain who can lose only one ship without ruining himself forever, the bank employee has but one chance at criminality. His fingerprints alone, filed away at his bonding company, insure that there shall be no second try. In a sense, when, alone on the quiet suburban street, Fred Barclay snapped the bank's door shut and turned away for the last time, he knew that he was carrying both his past and his future wrapped in one package, in the brief case under his arm—and for a while, at least, the knowledge frightened him. Penn Station, when he got there, had never seemed so vast, nor he himself so conspicuous in it. He had a feeling that everyone he passed must know who he was and what he was up to, and when the man sitting across the aisle from him on the train going out from New York started glancing over at him curiously, he found himself trembling.

But the man, a machine-tools salesman out of Detroit, name of Carraway, was merely looking for someone to talk to, and since Barclay's itinerary called for a change of trains at Trenton, he wasn't bothered with him too long, anyway. He was heading for the small town of Grammont, Pennsylvania, in the hills about Stroudsburg and not far from the Delaware River, and as he planned to use the place not merely as a temporary hideaway but as the starting point of a whole

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new career, he had made his approach to it with some care.

He had chosen Grammont in the first place because it was, in an old-fashioned, thoroughly unambitious way, a summer resort, and so offered a certain hospitality to the newcomer, and he had already made himself known there. As Frank Bennett, a real-estate dealer from Brooklyn, now largely inactive for reasons of health, he had visited the place several times in the course of the previous summer, quietly establishing himself as a personality, and had let himself be almost persuaded to buy a small summer house—"but one suitable for winter use, too, in case I decide to stay on"—and more or less retire there.

The town itself was extremely pleasant, with wide, well-shaded streets lined with roomy old houses that were mainly built in the solid Pennsylvania fashion, of brick, and as soon as he got there Fred (or Frank, now) settled down to enjoy it. To be sure, there were still a few uncomfortable moments. Fred stayed at the town's one hotel (now filled, of course, with summer visitors) while he dickered about the cottage, and there were times when, entering its busy little lobby, some pattern in the arrangement of the people there would suggest a trap; it would take all of his fortitude to walk from the door to the desk, get his key, and then—with his back turned to the crowd—go up the stairs to his room.

On the street, for a while, he had to fight to avoid a feeling that he was being followed, and for a time he couldn't open his room door without a gasping moment of apprehension that inside, sitting quietly on the bed, in the darkness, an agent of the F.B.I. was waiting for him. It gave him, too, day by day, a feeling of grating annoyance to see how long the newspapers hung onto the story of his escapade; it smacked of yellow journalism, he thought, when there were so many other things, obviously more important, to write about, and he longed for a good, juicy murder to take people's minds off the subject.

The murder did come, in time—in Allentown—and meanwhile Fred had calmed down enough to realize that what he'd been reading in the papers was good news, in a way, for it all indicated that the police were off his scent entirely. (The last clue they were reported following, for example, was a story by a service-station attendant in Clinton, Oklahoma, that he had sold gas to a tourist — well-dressed, brownish-haired, and very athletic-looking—who seemed to answer the police description.) Meantime, too, the very atmosphere of the town and its inhabitants, staid but friendly, unsuspicious and easy-going, had acted as a reassuring influence. Now, as Frank Bennett—a widower, quiet, gray-haired, and rather paunchy,

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whose idea of fun was a day spent on the lake, in a rowboat, fishing—he was, somewhat ironically, more like the true Fred Barclay than Fred Barclay himself had been.

The trouble was he found he didn't quite like it. He had his cottage by now. To be sure, and for reasons that he himself couldn't define, he'd decided to rent it, instead of buying. But there it was still, a snug, five-room affair at the edge of town, on the road leading to the lake. He had peace; he had quiet, and the unlimited leisure he had always longed for; and, of course, best of all, he had a matter of $61,000 stashed away, with which to enjoy them. He was beginning to extend his acquaintances, too, both among the town's solider citizens and among the summer visitors.

But they all bored him. The majority of the summer people at Grammont were elderly, given largely to bridge and porch sitting, and because of his new staidness and respectability it was chiefly with these that he found himself associated. There was a younger group, too, for whom the hotel's dance orchestra played on Saturday nights and the three or four roadhouses round about displayed their neons, who drove out to the lake in the afternoons for a swim or to the modest little country club for golf or tennis; and Fred, sitting on his front porch alone or on the hotel's veranda, listening, perhaps, to old Mrs. Hueston (of the Harrisburg Huestons) discourse on her relatives' afflictions, used to watch them whisk past in their bright-colored roadsters with a feeling that was not very far from envy.

They added color and life to the sleepy old town, and it came as a surprise to him to discover that the majority of the older inhabitants regarded them merely as profitable, and hence necessary, nuisances. "After Labor Day, Frank, they begin to clear out," Milan Warrant remarked to him one day, apparently with satisfaction. Milan owned the town's hardware-and-sporting-goods store, and was thus one of Grammont's leading merchants. He was a spry, wiry little man, with a nut-like face, deeply wrinkled, and wispy gray hair, and he and Frank were standing on the sidewalk in front of the hotel at the time, watching two tanned young fellows in striped jerseys as they playfully wrestled a blonde girl into their roadster. The girl was tanned, too, which made her hair look almost silvery, and she was wearing white tennis shorts and had long, slender, beautiful legs.

"Come October," Milan went on, "we old-timers, we'll have the town pretty much to ourselves." And though Fred understood that when Milan had said "we old-timers" it meant that he had been "accepted" at last—and knew, too, that he ought to be grateful—it gave him, at the moment, surprisingly little pleasure. "Yes, sir," Milan went on,

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and Fred realized suddenly that he already knew precisely what was coming next. "Come October, we'll have the town pret-ty much to ourselves." Milan Warrant, he had learned, had a way of saying things twice, the second time with a little more emphasis.

And as he told himself one day in an access of boredom, alone in his cottage—except for Mrs. Lopalsky, who came in to clean up for him, and she hardly counted—a man doesn't steal money just to save it. Stolen money is meant for spending, and the fact that he went out that afternoon and bought a hundred-and-seventy-five-dollar deer rifle, with 'scope, didn't cheer him up particularly. Milan Warrant had promised to take him deer-shooting, but at the moment that didn't seem the best way to spend the fall, either.

He had acquired a small second-hand car by then. In keeping with his new unassumingness, it was a battered but still serviceable business coupé, and Fred's downfall began when he drove out one night, on the spur of the moment, to the Whirlaway Club, a rather raucous little roadhouse a few miles out of town. It was supposed to have gambling upstairs, and Grammont's best people avoided it. But the girl was there, and from then on Fred's story follows almost a classic outline—a drink, a dance, a bit of mild flirtation, and then the gradual involvement. And the question is: Why did it happen?

Was it fate, as we think of fate—something preordained—or Fred's own contriving? To my own mind, it was largely the latter, and the only thing preordained was the practical impossibility of his escaping from the course he had embarked on when he decided to rob the bank at home. Life does imitate art. In a sense, it has to, for though life is the source of art, art is more persuasive and its patterns are more convincing; it is simpler and more straightforward. Most of all, perhaps, art is more *planned,* and so the man in real life, living fumblingly day by day, is inevitably led, for his own reassurance, to fall back on the longer-range plans of his counterparts in fiction.

So the cowboy, the better to bolster his role, imitates the cowboys in Western movies, and the policeman, accosting the burglar, uses terms that his fictional counterpart used in a detective mystery—and the burglar, similarly instructed, replies in kind. So Fred Barclay, in the end, was drawn into his own pattern, too. The girl's name, anyway, was Joan Marshall, and she was, of course, no better than she should be. She was, in fact, a dancer of sorts, and she had had a small part in a musical the local summer theater had put on—and then, since it was near the end of the season, had stayed on at the hotel till Labor

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Day. Fred had said hello to her two or three times before, as she'd brushed past him in the lobby of the hotel, or on its veranda, and now, seeing her standing at the bar of the Whirlaway, he used that as an excuse to speak to her.

"Well," she said, when they had finished their first dance together. "You're not such a square, after all."

Fred looked at her. "A square?" he asked, and she smiled at him. Seeing her now, closer at hand, he was delighted to note that she was nowhere near as young as he had first thought her. She had lines here and there, and a drawn look that needed make-up to conceal it. She looked worn and a little bit dissolute; and dissoluteness, he realized obscurely, was the thing that he longed for now.

They had had several drinks by then, and she gave him a long look, obviously meant to be full of meaning. "I can see there's a lot of things I've got to teach you," she said.

"Old?" she said, on another occasion. They were sitting in his car, in the moonlight, and the subject had come up, somehow. "You're not old. You're just soft, that's all. A little exercise would fix you up." And Fred, listening to her, began wondering if—in Philadelphia, perhaps—he might be able to outfit himself with another corset. Or, this time, even, do a real job of reducing.

"I used to play a pretty good game of golf," he told her.

"Did you? Gee! That's the game for me! Or it would be," she added, with a pretty little air of ruefulness, "if I could play it."

"I'll teach you," Fred said.

"But the clubs—"

"Let me get you some."

"You don't have to have gray hair, you know," she said. They were sitting in the parlor of his cottage, with Mrs. Lopalsky clattering the dishes disapprovingly in the kitchen. "I think it's just as silly for a man to let himself go like that as it is for a woman. Why'n't you tint it? Look!" she added suddenly, and she leaned forward with that quick little way that never failed to enchant him. "Tell you what I'll do. I'll get some Sheen at the drug store and do it for you! It's just a rinse, you know, and we'll do it so gradually I'll bet nobody'll ever notice."

It was a whirlwind courtship, and it caused some comment in Grammont. But the people there had little time to be more than perplexed by it, for when Labor Day came, Joan announced that she was going.

"Where?" asked Fred.

"I don't know." She was unusually gentle and wistful that day, and more dispirited than Fred had ever seen her before. Somehow, it made her seem more helpless, and more appealing. "Back to Philly, I guess. I can always get a job in a night-club chorus line there," she

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went on, and she gave him a sad little smile. "And that's as far as my money will take me, I guess. But if I could only get down to Miami, in time for the season—"

"Miami?"

"Yes, sure. I could headline down there. But why talk about that?" she said.

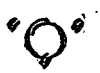
"Look, would Palm Beach do?"

Joan glanced at him. "Why, yes, sure. Or Sarasota. They all know me down there. But why talk about it?" she repeated.

"But why not?" Fred demanded. "Come down there with me."

And this time she looked at him hard, and long. This, she thought, could be it, if she played it right. "In that old bus of yours?" she asked, with just the tiniest trace of sarcasm. If he had any money, she might as well find it out now. "Do you think it could make it?"

Two weeks later, in a bright-blue convertible, with a bag of golf clubs in the back and a blonde—did I say that Miss Marshall was a blonde?—by his side, Fred Barclay was arrested as he was unloading his luggage at the Palmcrest Hotel in Sarasota. He was a few months past schedule, it's true, but that hardly mattered to the two detectives, Edward Connelly, of 148 Palmetto Drive, and James C. Egan, of 3965 Poinciana, who made the pinch. The funny thing was that in this case they also arrested the girl. She, it turned out, was wanted, too, for making off with another girl's fur coat and jewelry in Baltimore, the season before. She was later in turning up, even, than Barclay, but otherwise she, too, ran true to form.



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1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher*, Bernard G. Davis, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22; *Managing Editor*, Robert P. Mills, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22; *Business Manager*, None. 2. The owners are: Davis Publications, Inc., 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22; Bernard G. Davis, 527 Madison Avenue, New York 22. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. (Signed) B. G. Davis, *Publisher*. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 18th day of September, 1958. (Seal) Melvin Flamm, *Notary Public*. (My commission expires March 30, 1959.)

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an EQMM "first"

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	RICHARD M. GORDON
TITLE:	*Death of a Harvard Man*
TYPE:	Do-It-Yourself Riddle Story
LOCALE:	New York City subway
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*An unusual and delightful "first story" that is bound to cause repercussions at Cambridge, New Haven, perhaps at Princeton. Why not test your own wits on the problem?*

FOR REASONS WHICH HE CONSIDERED sufficient and which we need not consider here at all, young Dyer, Harvard '56, had decided to take arms against a sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them.

To do this as decently as he might, he had left his native Boston where any such act of self-expression is looked on askance and had journeyed to New York where the nonconformist and the dramatic fail to raise even an eyebrow. They were better able to handle this sort of thing in New York, he felt, and in any case, he would rather his shattered remains were collected by the callous hands of insensitive strangers than by the shocked and disapproving hands of his fastidious Boston friends.

He had had a busy day, but now his affairs were in order: his last will and testament lay on the dresser of his room at the Harvard Club among three touching letters of farewell and apology to his parents, his fiancée, and the Alumni Secretary of the Class of '56. He was prepared to meet the sole confidants of his fellow Bostonians, the Cabots.

He had chosen the 42nd Street Station of the Sixth Avenue Subway as his point of departure from this vale of tears. It was dark, dank, depressing, and, at 4:30 on a Sunday morning, nearly deserted. There was only a ragged bum sprawled

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on a bench at the rear of the platform, an empty pint bottle which had contained a cheap California Muscatel beside him. The derelict was staring vacantly into his own world of sordid misery—a world which could not possibly touch on young Dyer's world of high tragedy.

Young Dyer paced impatiently as he waited for his train. And then, far away uptown in the darkness, there came a rumbling. The approaching train was only a local, but young Dyer was not going far. He watched fascinated as the lights materialized out of the gloom of the tunnel. Destiny and a Sixth Avenue local rushed down upon him as he poised tensely at the edge of the platform.

But young Dyer was the sort of man (boy, rather) who could not, even in his extremity, resist an ironic gesture to demonstrate his superiority to the common, non-Harvard humanity which was content to persist in a world he was rejecting.

With an exaggerated bow to the bum on the bench, he uttered the despairing cry of the gladiators of Rome: *"Morituri te salutamus!* — we who are about to die salute you!"

Rather surprisingly, before he could turn to the business at hand, there was a reply. The derelict, reclining languidly like a spectator in a loge at the Colosseum, turned up his thumb and said, *"Vive!"*—the "Live!" of the Caesars.

Young Dyer was stopped in his tracks but not on them. By the time he had collected himself, the first car of the local had passed him, and the train was grinding to a halt.

"I thought I had better stop you," said the tramp, rising. His voice was well modulated, and his accent strangely familiar. "It's none of my business, of course," he continued, "but it does seem rather wasteful that a man who has his youth, his health, a Brooks Brothers suit, and a knowledge of Latin should squander all these assets under the wheels of a train. There are those who have a great deal less and still manage to carry on."

Young Dyer was ashamed; he looked down at his hand-lasted, hand-stitched, three-eyelet oxfords, and realized they contrasted sharply with the cracked, lop-heeled, shapeless lumps of dirty leather on the feet of the older man. He had been a bit lacking in courage, he thought. After all, he was a Harvard Man. There was always a comfortable, dignified place in the world for one such as he, if not in Boston, in the wilderness elsewhere. His pioneer blood came to the fore; in spite of all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, he would continue living.

"Thank you," he said simply and sincerely. "You saved my life, and I'd like to help you get back on your feet again. A pair of shoes . . . a new suit . . . I've got some extra things in my room at the Harvard Club.

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Come with me—it's not far, just over at 44th and . . ."

"I know where it is," interrupted the derelict, taking young Dyer by the arm. "I spent some time there myself years ago." And then, through the swelling roar of a southbound express, young Dyer heard the bum say, "I'm Hugh Haven, Class of '34—"

With a cry of horror, Dyer tore himself from the other's grasp and hurled himself under the wheels of the oncoming D train . . .

Of course, we could end it here—it ended here for young Dyer. But there are at least three other possible endings . . .

Ending One

Hugh Haven, Harvard '34, shook his head sadly as he sauntered unhurriedly toward the exit. For some reason, which it is just as well not to examine, an old college song came as if of its own accord to his lips. *"With Crimson in Triumph Flashing . . ."* he hummed absently to himself as he started up the stairs to the street.

There would now be a delay on the downtown express, and he thought he might as well again try to get a taxi. It is difficult to get a driver to pick you up when you are returning from a masquerade after winning first prize for authenticity as a bum. However, Mr. Haven was, on the whole, well satisfied with his prize-winning costume and the impression it made even on passing strangers.

Ending Two

Hugh Haven Glass, of 34 West 3rd Street, shrugged disconsolately and ambled away from the gathering crowd.

"Now why did he do that?" he said to himself, wondering if the young man had been hard of hearing. "I only wanted to give him my name and address in case he wanted to send me a check."

In his days as a busboy at the Harvard Club bar, before he was fired for reaching above himself into the members' rooms upstairs, he had learned all about Harvard Men—what they drank, how they dressed, how they spoke. He had even learned a bit of Latin while he was there.

Ending Three

Hugh Haven, Yale '34, smiled a satisfied smile and relapsed on his bench. He hummed *Boola Boola* softly under his breath.

Once again Yale had triumphed over her ancient adversary.

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*As you probably remember, there are only two books of short stories about Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen—*THE THINKING MACHINE *(1907) and* THE THINKING MACHINE ON THE CASE *(1908). But as you may also recall, there was a third series of short stories about the famous detective which began to appear in Sunday magazines in January 1907; this final series, however, was never published in book form. For this third series, the author, Jacques Futrelle, wrote a special Introduction which told how the narrator first met the Great Logician. This introduction has not been reprinted since 1907—indeed, it was not known to exist until Mrs. Futrelle came upon it a year or so ago and called it to your Editors' attention.*

Because the Introduction is a discovery of great importance to the history of the detective story, and because it has been "unknown" for half a century, we have decided to give it to you as the "opening" of a Thinking Machine story. The Introduction is relatively short—less than one-quarter of the story that follows; but we think you will find Mr. Futrelle's first experience with the Thinking Machine full of interest and nostalgia, and in the classic tradition of "first meetings." The rest of the story—more than three-quarters of the text—is also a great "find": it is the complete version of one of the Thinking Machine tales in the third series—a tale which, like the "lost" Introduction, has not been reprinted in any form whatever for more than fifty years. This "new" adventure of the Thinking Machine has the same wonderful readability, the same feeling of having been written within the last decade (instead of five decades ago), and the same plot ingenuity that we have come to associate with Jacques Futrelle's best work. Happy reading!

THE THINKING MACHINE INVESTIGATES

by JACQUES FUTRELLE

IT WAS ONCE MY GOOD FORTUNE TO meet in person Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, Ph.D., LL.D., F.R.S., M.D., etc. The meeting came about through a singular happening that was as mystifying as it was dangerous to me—he saved my life, in fact. And in the process of hauling me back from eternity—the edge of that appalling mist that separates life and death—I had full opportunity of witnessing the work-

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ings of that marvelously keen, cold brain which has made him the most distinguished scientist and logician of his day.

It was some time afterward, however, that Professor Van Dusen was identified in my mind as The Thinking Machine. Then I recalled a sensational newspaper story of his having defeated the Russian chess champion of the world after only a day's instruction in the game by our American champion, and the Russian's remark in acknowledging defeat, "You are not a man, sir, you are a brain—a machine—a thinking machine." The Russian's phrase had been applied to the scientist by a newspaperman I know well, Hutchinson Hatch. And so the eminent scientist and logician, Professor Van Dusen, became popularly known as The Thinking Machine.

But to get back to my meeting with him the night he saved my life.

I had dined at the Hotel Teutonic, taken a cigar from my pocket, lighted it, and started for a stroll across Boston Common. It was after eight o'clock on one of those clear, nippy evenings of winter. I was near the center of the common on one of the many little bypaths that lead toward Beacon Hill when I became conscious of an acute pain in my chest, a sudden fluttering of my heart, and a constriction in my throat. The lights in the distance began to waver and grow dim, and perspiration broke out all over me from an inward gnawing agony which grew more intense each moment. I felt myself reeling, my cigar dropped from my fingers, and I clutched at a seat to steady myself. There was no one near me. I tried to call, then everything grew dark, and I sank down on the ground. My last recollection was of a figure approaching me; the last words I heard were a petulant, irritable "Dear me." Then I was lost to consciousness.

When I discovered consciousness, I lay on a couch in a strange room. My eyes wandered weakly about and lingered with a childish interest on half a dozen spots that reflected glitteringly the light of an electric bulb set high up on one side. These bright spots, I came to realize after a moment, were metal parts of various instruments of a laboratory. For a time I lay helpless, listless, with trembling pulse and eardrums thumping; then I heard steps approaching, and someone bent over and peered into my face.

It was a man, but such a man as I had never seen before. A great shock of straw-yellow hair tumbled about a broad, high forehead, a small, wrinkled, querulous face—the face of an aged child—a pair of watery blue eyes squinting aggressively through thick spectacles, and a thin-lipped mouth as straight as the mark of a surgeon's knife, save for the drooping corners. My

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impression was that it was some sort of hallucination, the distorted vagary of a disordered brain. But gradually my vision cleared, and the grip of slender fingers on my pulse made me realize the reality of the—the apparition.

"How do you feel?" The thin lips had opened just enough to let out the question; the tone was curt and belligerent, and the voice rasped unpleasantly. At the same time the squint eyes were focused on mine with a steady, piercing glare that made me uneasy. I tried to answer, but my tongue refused to move. The gaze continued for an instant, then the man—The Thinking Machine—turned away and prepared a particularly vile-smelling concoction which he poured into me. Then I was lost again.

After a time—it might have been minutes or hours—I felt again the hand on my pulse, and again The Thinking Machine favored me with a glare. An hour later I was sitting up on the couch with unclouded brain, and a heartbeat that was nearly normal. It was then I learned why Professor Van Dusen, an eminent man of the sciences, had been dubbed The Thinking Machine. I understood first-hand how material muddles were so unfailingly dissipated by unadulterated, infallible logic.

Remember that I had gone into that room an inanimate thing, inert, unconscious, mentally and physically dead to all practical intents—and beyond the point where I might have babbled a single elucidating fact about myself. And remember, too, that I didn't know—had not the faintest idea—what had happened to me beyond the fact that I had fallen unconscious. The Thinking Machine didn't ask questions, yet he supplied all the missing details, together with a host of personal, intimate things of which he could personally have had no knowledge. In other words I was an abstruse problem to him, and he solved me. With head tilted back against the cushion of his chair—and such a head! — with eyes unwaveringly turned upward and fingertips pressed together, he sat there, a strange, grotesque little figure in the midst of his laboratory apparatus. Not for a moment did he display the slightest interest in me as a person; it was all as if I had been written down on a slate, to be wiped off when I was solved.

"Did this ever happen to you before?" he asked abruptly.

"No," I replied. "What was it?"

"You were poisoned," he said. "The poison was a deadly one—corrosive sublimate or bichloride of mercury. The shock was very severe, but you will be all right in—"

"Poisoned!" I exclaimed aghast. "Who poisoned me? Why?"

"You poisoned yourself," he replied testily. "It was your own carelessness. Nine out of ten persons

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handle poison as if it were candy, and you are like all the rest."

"But I couldn't have poisoned myself," I protested. "Why, I have had no occasion to handle poison, not for—I don't know how long."

"I do know," he said. "It was nearly a year ago when you handled it; but corrosive sublimate is always dangerous."

The tone irritated me, the impassive arrogance of the little man inflamed my reeling brain, and I am not sure that I did not shake my finger in his face.

"If I was poisoned," I declared with some heat, "it was not my fault. Somebody gave it to me, somebody tried to—"

"You poisoned yourself," said The Thinking Machine impatiently. "You talk like a child."

"How do you know I poisoned myself? How do you know I ever handled a poison? And how do you know it was a year ago—if I did?"

The Thinking Machine regarded me coldly for an instant, and then those strange eyes of his wandered upward again.

"I know these things," he said, "just as I know your name, address, and profession from cards I found in your pockets; just as I know you smoke, from half a dozen cigars on you; just as I know you are wearing those clothes for the first time this winter; just as I know you lost your wife within a few months; that you kept house then; and that your house was infested with insects. I know just as I know everything else—by the rules of inevitable logic."

My head was whirling. I stared at him in blank astonishment.

"But *how* do you know these things?" I insisted in bewilderment.

"The average person of today," replied the scientist, "knows nothing unless it is written down and thrust under his nose. I happen to be a physician. I saw you fall and went to you. My first thought was that you had suffered a heart attack. Your pulse showed it was not a heart attack, and it was obviously not apoplexy. Now, there was no visible reason why you should have collapsed like that. There had been no shot, there was no wound. Therefore, poison. An examination confirmed this hypothesis; your symptoms showed that it was bichloride of mercury. I got a taxi driver to help me get you to his taxi and brought you here to my house. From the fact that you were not dead, I knew your system had absorbed only a minute quantity of poison—a quantity so small it indicated that there had been no suicidal intent, and indicated, too, that no one else had administered it. If this were true, I knew—I didn't guess, I *knew*—that the poisoning was accidental. How accidental?

"My first surmise, naturally, was that the poison had been absorbed through the mouth. I searched

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your pockets. The only thing I found that you would put into your mouth were the cigars. Were they poisoned? A test showed that they were—all of them. With intent to kill? No. Not enough poison was used. Was the poison a part of the gum used to bind the cigars? Possible, of course, but not probable. Then what?" He lowered his eyes and squinted at me suddenly, aggressively. I shook my head, and as an afterthought closed my gaping mouth.

"Perhaps you carried corrosive sublimate in your pockets. I didn't find any, but perhaps you once had carried it. I tore out the coat pocket in which you carried the cigars and subjected it to a test. At some time there had been corrosive sublimate, in the form of powder or crystals, in the pocket, and in some manner, perhaps because of an imperfection in the packaging, a minute quantity was loose in your pocket.

"Here was an answer to every question; here was how the cigars were poisoned, and, in combination with the tailor's tag inside your pocket, a short history of your life. Briefly it was this: Once you had corrosive sublimate in your pocket. For what purpose? First thought—to rid your house of insects. Second thought—if you were boarding, married or unmarried, the task of getting rid of the insects would have been left to servants; and this would possibly have been the case even if you had been living at home. So I assumed for the instant that you were keeping house, and if keeping house you were married and had bought the poison for use in your own house.

"So with little effort I had you married and keeping house. Then what? The tailor's tag, with your name and the date your suit was made—one year and three months ago. It is a winter suit. If you had worn it since the poison first became loose in your pocket, what happened to you tonight would have happened to you before; therefore, I assumed you had purchased the poison early last spring when insects began to be troublesome, and immediately after that you laid away the suit until this winter. I know you are wearing it for the first time this winter, because, again, this collapse has not happened to you before; and because, too, I detect a faint odor of moth balls. A band of crepe on your hat, the picture of a young woman in your watch; and the fact that you are now living at your club—as your bill for the past month shows—establish beyond doubt that you are a widower."

"It's perfectly miraculous!" I exclaimed.

"Logic, logic, logic," snapped the irritable little scientist. "You are a lawyer, and you should know the correlation of facts; you should know that two and two make four, not sometimes but all the time. . . ."

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Watson Richards told the following story at the exclusive Algonquin Club one afternoon. He related it as the most extraordinary thing that had ever happened to him—an unsolved mystery, a riddle without an answer, in which he had happened to play a principal part.

Richards is a distinguished character starring at the moment in Boston after a three-year run of his play on Broadway. And the unvarnished statement of fact from his lips became a tensely dramatic narrative, strange, unreal, even uncanny, but utterly convincing. His listeners were two other actors and a noted poet, and his host was a distinguished millionaire; Hutchinson Hatch, the reporter, was also present. The conversation had turned to storytelling when the host remarked that in every man's life there is an incident as strange and unusual as anything ever written, and often without an ending. Richards agreed with him, and he was elected to be the first to tell his story. This is the story he told . . .

You know there are few men in the profession today, the ones who really amount to anything, who haven't had their hard knocks. Take myself. I have known what it is to be hungry, to covet an apple on a corner fruit stand, to look longingly at the bread in a baker's shop. Perhaps that is a good thing for the actor because his business is interpreting varying emotions. One can't play the starving man as the starving man should be played unless one has actually starved; one can't love hopelessly, desperately, in a play unless one has loved hopelessly, desperately, in real life. I am speaking, of course, in a general sense. I don't mean that an actor can't die effectively on the stage unless he had previously died.

Well, my hard times came early and lasted a long time. It was only three years ago that I made my hit in the theater, and I can trace my change of fortune to the incident I shall tell you about, and the $100 I made for playing the strangest role in my career. From that moment success came piling on top of those lean days when a bed was a luxury and a day without anything to eat was a common occurrence. So it was just about three years ago that a crisis, a real crisis, came in my affairs. I had reached the end. I had gone all day without food, had slept in the park that night, and here it was two o'clock in the afternoon of another day.

I was standing on a Tremont Street corner gazing at the food in the window of a restaurant. I was stranded in Boston with no way to get back to New York. I knew there was no use going to any of the agents or managers in Boston, and as these thoughts went through my mind I turned and found

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myself facing a stranger, a well groomed, distinguished-looking man of about forty years.

"Is this Mr. Richards?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Mr. Watson Richards, the character actor?"

I admitted I was.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, at the agencies and managers' offices," he explained. "I want to engage you to do a part for one performance. Are you at liberty?"

You may imagine what that meant to me at that moment. An unpleasant vision of Charles River began to fade. I assumed a casualness I did not feel.

"I am at liberty," I replied. "Be glad to do it. What sort of a part is it?"

"An old man," the stranger told me. "Just one performance, you know. Perhaps you'd better come with me now and see Mr. Hallman."

I agreed with a readiness I hoped passed unnoticed, and he signaled a taxi. The Mr. Hallman we were to see was perhaps the manager or stage manager—a famous local stage director, no doubt. I felt that I had stumbled on a bit of luck.

We had driven a few blocks in the general direction of the Charles River, my companion chatting pleasantly about the plays in Boston, when he asked me if I'd like a smoke and offered me an excellent cigar. I accepted it. I was wild for a smoke, and that particular brand of cigars was even more welcome than a meal at that moment. I had only taken a few puffs from it before I lost myself completely; at the time I thought my weakness was due to hunger.

The next thing I remember was getting out of the taxi—I think the stranger helped me—and going into a house. Where it was I didn't know. It might have been in Cambridge, or in one of Boston's suburbs. I was giddy, dizzy, and I merely knew I was in a house. Suddenly I stood before a tall, sharp-faced man who impressed me as being what we call on the stage a tremendous type. You know what I mean, a man of great force and power. He was Mr. Hallman. The stranger introduced me and left the room. Mr. Hallman regarded me keenly for several minutes. My head was clearing—I had thrown away the cigar at the door—and I wondered if I measured up to the part he wanted me to play.

"You play character parts?" he asked me.

"Yes, all the usual things," I told him. "I'm rather obscure but—"

"I know," he interrupted. "I have seen you and think you have unusual ability. I have been told you are remarkably clever at make-up."

I decided to accept the compliment. I nodded. He paused to stare at me for a long time.

"For instance," he said at last,

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"you would have no difficulty in making up as a man of eighty?"

"Not the slightest," I told him. "I have played such parts."

"Yes, yes, I know," he said. "Of course your make-up is most important. I only want you for one—er—performance, but the make-up must be perfect." Again he paused and stared at me. "The pay will be one hundred dollars for the one performance. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Absolutely," I replied, and I'm sure I never read a line with the feeling I put into that one word.

Mr. Hallman took a photograph from the drawer of a desk. He looked at it, then at me several times, then gave it to me.

"Can you make up to look exactly like that?" he asked. "Not *something* like this man, but *exactly* like him?"

I studied the photograph. It was of an old man, with features not unlike the general shape of my own face. He had white hair and was clean-shaven. It was simple enough with the proper wig, a make-up box, and a good mirror.

"I can," I told Mr. Hallman.

"Would you mind putting on the make-up now so that I may judge for myself?" he asked.

"Certainly not," I replied. It did not strike me at the time as being anything unusual. "But I'll need the wig and grease paints."

"Here they are, and there is a mirror in front of you. Go ahead."

I examined the wig and compared it with the photograph. It was as nearly perfect as anything I had ever seen. The make-up box was new and complete. It didn't occur to me until afterward that it had never been used before.

I went to work, with Mr. Hallman pacing nervously up and down behind me. At the end of twenty minutes I turned upon him a face so like the photograph that I might have posed for it. He stared at me in amazement.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "That's it! It's marvelous!" Then he turned and opened the door. "Come in, Frank," he called, and the man whom I had first met and who had brought me there came into the room. Mr. Hallman indicated me with a wave of the hand. "How is it?" he asked.

Frank also seemed astonished. Then the astonishment gave way to another expression. I could not decide just what it was. You may imagine I awaited the verdict anxiously.

"Perfect, absolutely perfect," Frank said at last.

"I wonder if he is quite pale enough," Mr. Hallman suggested.

"Easily remedied," I said, and turned again to the make-up box. A moment later I turned back to the two men for approval.

"That's it!" they exclaimed together.

"What about my hands?" I asked. "Will it be necessary for

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me to use my hands in any way?"

"Oh, yes. You will have to sign a document."

I turned again to the make-up box and aged my hands.

"How's that?" I wanted to know.

"Excellent," Hallman replied. "You are indeed a great artist."

Frank looked at Mr. Hallman inquiringly. "Go ahead," he said, and Frank left the room. Hallman closed and locked the door behind him, then came back and sat down in front of me. He stared at me for a long time. Suddenly he opened an upper drawer of the desk and glanced in. A revolver was in the drawer right under his hand. I know now he intended that I should see it.

"Now, Mr. Richards," he said at last, "what we want you to do is very simple and, as I said, there's a hundred dollars in it for you. You need it, you must have it. Have another cigar."

Foolishly enough I accepted it. While I smoked he gave me his instructions.

"The part you are to play is that of an old man who is ill in bed. Speechless, utterly helpless. You are dying and I want to play the part up to the hilt. Use your eyes if you like, but *don't speak*! Do you understand—*you must not speak*!"

There seemed to be a certain menace in the instructions.

As I smoked, the dizziness I had felt before was coming upon me again. I began to wonder if the cigar was drugged, but I kept smoking.

"There will be no rehearsal," Mr. Hallman told me. He was fingering the revolver I had seen in the desk, but it made no particular impression on me. "If I ask you questions you may nod, but *don't speak*! Do what I tell you to do and *nothing else!*"

Everything was growing very hazy. I remember that I tried to overcome it, then it seemed to overwhelm me and I was utterly helpless.

"When am I to play this part?" I remember asking.

"Now!" He arose suddenly. "I'm afraid you don't understand me, Mr. Richards," he said. "If you play the part properly you get the hundred dollars. If you don't—this!"

He touched the revolver. I stared at him dumbly, overcome by a helpless terror. I tried to stand up, then there came a blank, for how long I don't know. The next thing I remember I was lying in bed propped up against several pillows. I opened my eyes feebly enough, and there wasn't any acting about it; whoever drugged those cigars knew his business.

There beside the bed was Hallman with a grief-stricken expression that made my art seem amateurish. Another man was there—not Frank—and a woman about forty years old. I couldn't see their

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features—I wouldn't even be able to suggest a description of them because the room was so dark, and they stood out of the line of light from a shaded lamp beside the bed. But I could see Hallman's devilish face when, every now and then, he came near me—to keep me intimidated. The three talked in low tones—sick room voices—and I couldn't hear what they said. I doubt if I could have understood even if I had heard.

The door opened suddenly and a girl entered. I have seen many women, on the stage and off, who had the reputation of being the world's most beautiful—but this girl! The effect of her entrance was electrical—at least, upon me. She stood in the open door just an instant with the light from the hallway outside on her beautiful face. She gave one little cry, rushed toward the bed, and dropped on her knees beside it. She was shaking with sobs, absolutely grief-stricken.

I realized that in some way I was being used to injure this girl. A sudden feeling of anger seized me, but I couldn't move. Hallman may have noticed my effort and caught the blaze in my eyes for he came to the other side of the bed, and under cover of a handkerchief he had been using rather ostentatiously, pressed the revolver to my side. No one noticed it, and I only felt it.

Even in my dazed condition I was seized with a desperate desire to fight it out, to make him kill me if he had to, because I would not deceive this girl, whoever she was. I tried to think, to outwit him. I knew if I could jerk my head down on the pillow it would disarrange the wig and she would notice. But try as hard as I could, I couldn't do it. I had done too good a job of putting on that wig. I struggled to speak, but no sound came. I tried to lift up my hands, to protest, and I couldn't. I didn't have to act helpless—I was, utterly helpless.

"Are you conscious," asked Hallman.

I couldn't speak, couldn't nod as he had instructed. I could only glare at him. He gave me another poke in the ribs with the revolver. And all this time the girl was sobbing there beside me in a frenzy of grief.

Someone put a paper in front of me on a book, a legal-looking document, and guided my hand across it. Then everything faded slowly, slowly. My eyes closed in spite of the desperate effort I made to keep them open. The last thing I saw was the shining gold of the girl's hair as she sobbed there beside me.

When I came to, a policeman was shaking me. I was sitting on a bench in the Common. He swore at me and told me to move on. I got up and began to walk slowly along the path. My right hand was in my pocket and it clenched something tightly. I drew out my hand

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and looked at the something. It was a hundred-dollar bill. Now I could get myself a meal and I staggered in the direction of Tremont Street where I knew I would find a restaurant. But I never got there.

I woke up in a hospital, and was there for three days before I was released. I said nothing of what had happened to me, although a police official was called in to ask me questions and try to solve the mystery of my drugged condition. I insisted that I knew nothing. I couldn't have given the police anything to work on to find out what it all meant. I didn't know where I had been, the street, the house, what the conspirators were up to—nothing. I only knew that somehow I had harmed a beautiful girl and that I'd never see her again to ask her forgiveness.

Well, gentlemen, that's the story, the incident in my life you may not think stranger than fiction, but it's the most incredible thing that ever happened to me. There's no murder in it, no hair-breadth escape, no build-up to an exciting climax—just a riddle without an answer, an unsolved mystery. And there's not a chance of ever finding out what it's all about.

Hutchinson Hatch related the story casually a day or so later to Professor S. F. X. Van Dusen, The Thinking Machine. That eminent man of science listened petulantly, as he listened to all things, punctuating the story from time to time with little explosions that resulted from dropping minute globules of one chemical compound into another. Hatch leaned on the laboratory table, idly watching the experiment as he talked.

"It happened in Cambridge?" asked the scientist.

"Mr. Richards thinks it was in Cambridge. He isn't sure."

"He has no idea which part of Cambridge?"

"Not the slightest. I imagine the drugged cigar and his weakened condition from lack of food made him lose his bearings in the taxi."

"I daresay," commented the scientist. "And of course he has never seen Hallman again?"

"No, or I'm sure he would have mentioned it."

The Thinking Machine thoughtfully poured a graduated glass half full of a colorless liquid, squinted at it through his perpetually narrowed eyes, then emptied it into the vessel before him. There was a loud report and a white flame leaped straight up. He drew back, dried his hands, then crossed to a chair and sat down. Hatch dropped into a chair nearby. And thus they sat for a minute or more.

"Does Mr. Richards remember the precise date of this affair?" asked the scientist at last.

"Perhaps he does, although he didn't mention that, either," replied the reporter.

"Suppose, Mr. Hatch, you see Mr.

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Richards and get the date—exactly if possible. You might telephone it to me. Perhaps—" and he shrugged.

"You think there is a possibility of solving this riddle?" asked the reporter eagerly.

"Certainly," snapped The Thinking Machine. "It requires no solution. It's ridiculously simple, obvious. Evidently the girl Mr. Richards speaks of has been the victim of a tremendous plot. It's worth looking into for her sake."

"Remember, Professor, it happened three years ago," Hatch suggested.

"It wouldn't matter if it happened three hundred years ago," declared the scientist. "Logic, Mr. Hatch, remains the same through all the ages, from Adam and Eve to us. Two and two made four in the Garden of Eden just as they do now in a counting house. Therefore, the solution is absurdly simple. The only problem is to discover the identity of the principals in this plot. And a child could do that."

Hatch smiled. He knew the singular methods of this superbly balanced brain, knew them from long association, so he completely accepted the statement as it was made. Even so, perplexed wrinkles were on his brow when he left.

That afternoon he telephoned The Thinking Machine from the Algonquin Club.

"The date you asked me to get for you, sir, was May 19 three years ago," the reporter said to him.

"There's no doubt about it?" came an irritated question.

"Not the slightest," Hatch assured him. "Mr. Richards remembers it distinctly. Says he has a reason to remember the date."

"Very well, Mr. Hatch. Drop by tomorrow afternoon. Perhaps we can solve this riddle for your Mr. Richards. Goodbye."

Hatch called as directed the following afternoon, but Professor Van Dusen was not in.

"He went out about nine o'clock this morning and hasn't come back yet," the scientist's aged housekeeper, Martha, told him.

Hatch called again at six o'clock and received the same answer. Again at ten o'clock that night.

"He hasn't returned yet," Martha told him. "He said he would be back for luncheon, but he didn't come."

Hatch thought it over as he put down the receiver. Early the following morning he telephoned again, and there was a note of anxiety in Martha's voice as she answered.

"He hasn't come back yet, sir," she explained. "Please, what ought I to do? I'm afraid something has happened to him."

"Don't do anything yet," Hatch advised her. "I'm sure he will return today."

Hatch telephoned again at noon, then at six o'clock, then at ten that night. The scientist had not re-

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turned, and Martha had had no word from him. The reporter was now worried. He wondered how he should proceed. He couldn't figure it out and he began to think of the possibilities. Something had to be done. He made sure at Police Headquarters that The Thinking Machine was not the victim of an accident, and he decided if the scientist did not return to his home by the next morning he would take up his disappearance with Detective Mallory at Headquarters.

As it happened, this step was made unnecessary by the unexpected arrival of a letter from The Thinking Machine. Hatch drew a breath of relief as he recognized the crabbed, minute scrawl on the envelope. He ripped open the letter. It read:

Employ an expert burglar, a careful, clever man. At two o'clock of the night following the receipt of this letter, go with him to the alley that runs in back of 810 Cranston Street. Enter this house with him from the rear, go up two flights of stairs, and let him pick the lock of the third door on the left from the head of the stairs. Silence above everything. Don't shoot if it is possible to avoid it.

Van Dusen.

P.S. Bring along some sandwiches.

Hatch stared at the letter in blank bewilderment for a long time. But he obeyed orders. And at ten minutes of two o'clock that night he boosted the notorious "Blindy" Bates to the top of the rear fence of 810 Cranston street. "Blindy" Bates was a gentleman of rare accomplishments in his profession and one who, the reporter knew, could be depended upon to do this job with alacrity and finesse. "Blindy" hauled the reporter up after him, and they leaped down lightly inside the yard.

The back door was simplicity itself to the gifted Mr. Bates, and yielded in less than sixty seconds. Then came a sneaking, noiseless advance along the lower hallway. Up the first flight safely, with "Blindy" Bates leading the way, then along the upper hall and up the second flight. There was not a sound in the house, and Hatch and "Blindy" moved like ghosts.

At the top of the second flight the gifted Mr. Bates shot a cautious gleam from his flashlight along the hallway. The third door it was, eh? And a moment later he was concentrating on the three locks of this door. Still there had not been the slightest sound. The one spot in the darkness was the light that illumined the lock as "Blindy" worked skillfully. The first lock came unfastened, then the second, and finally the third. Mr. Bates didn't open the door—he was too clever to do that—he stepped back, and the door opened of itself. Involuntarily Hatch closed his hand on his revolver, and Mr. Bates's ready

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weapon glittered a little in the darkness.

"Thanks," came the querulous voice of Professor Van Dusen. "Mr. Hatch, did you bring me some sandwiches?"

The clever Mr. Bates laid a finger on his lips, then Hatch and the scientist, nibbling a sandwich as he went, followed along the hall, down the stairs, and along the lower hallway to the outside. They climbed over the back fence, Hatch assisting the little scientist, and sneaked along the alley to the street. Half an hour later The Thinking Machine and the reporter apeared at Police Headquarters, but the gifted Mr. Bates, being somewhat of a retiring and unostentatious disposition, did not accompany them; he went his own way fingering a bill of moderately large denomination.

Detective Mallory was home in bed, but Detective Cunningham, another shining light at Headquarters, received his distinguished visitor and the reporter. He was not in the least surprised when celebrities called upon him at half-past three in the morning, especially when the celebrity in question was Professor Van Dusen. He, too, knew The Thinking Machine.

That eminent scientist lost no time in stating his mission.

"There's a man named Howard Guerrin now asleep in his stateroom aboard the liner Austriana which sails at five o'clock this morning for England. I wish to have him arrested immediately. Please hurry as you have just an hour and a half before sailing time."

"What's the charge?" asked the detective.

"Really it's of no consequence," replied The Thinking Machine. "Attempted murder, conspiracy, embezzlement, fraud — whatever you like. I can prove all of them."

"I'll go after him myself," said the startled detective.

"And there's also a young woman aboard," continued The Thinking Machine, "a Miss Hilda Fanshawe. Please have her detained—not arrested, just detained. And keep a close watch on her—not to prevent escape but to protect her."

Detective Cunningham glanced at his watch. He had plenty of time to get to the pier before five o'clock.

"Tell us about it, sir," he suggested.

"Another time," The Thinking Machine said wearily. "I haven't slept for more than forty-eight hours. I'll explain it all this afternoon after I've had some sleep. We'll need witnesses." He turned to the reporter. "Mr. Hatch, have you another sandwich? I'm still hungry."

At Police Headquarters that afternoon, The Thinking Machine recited briefly the salient points of the story told by the actor, Watson Richards. His listeners were Howard Guerrin, tall, keen-faced, and

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looking rather bored; Miss Hilda Fanshawe, whose pretty face reflected her varying thoughts; Hutchinson Hatch, reporter; Chief of Detectives Mallory; and three Headquarters men. Every eye was on the drawn face of the diminutive scientist, as he sat far back in his chair with squinting eyes turned upward and fingertips pressed together. Hatch had never before seen him look weary; but his voice was firm and his mind alert, as always.

"From the facts as he stated them," the scientist explained, "we knew in the beginning, beyond all question, that Mr. Richards was used as a tool in some conspiracy of fraud. That was obvious. So the first thing to do was to learn the identity of the persons who played the principal parts in it. From Mr. Richard's story we apparently had nothing, yet it gave us practically the names and addresses of the persons at the bottom of this clever conspiracy.

"How? To find out how we will have to consider the purpose of the conspiracy. An actor—an artist in character impersonation and make-up—is picked up in the street and compelled to go through the mummery of a deathbed scene while stupefied with drugs. Obviously, this was arranged for the benefit of some person, or persons, who must be convinced that he, or she, had witnessed a death and perhaps the signing of a will. The necessity for this deception must have been vital, pressing, to cause the conspirators to resort to so desperate a scheme. Vital, pressing—but how?

"One's first thought is money. A paper is signed. Hence, money to be disposed of by will; and a will signed under the eyes of that person for whose benefit the farce was acted. Thus legal difficulties and dispute were effectively cut off. I mean, for instance, that if the particular person who was *dis*inherited by a will was present and witnessed the signature of that will, also the death of the signer, it would leave no grounds for attacking the will as a fraud.

"So we assume a will was signed—not a deed, or anything of that sort, but a will. We know within reason that the mummery was arranged for the benefit of a young woman—Miss Fanshawe, here. From the intricacy and daring of the plot, it is safe to assume that a large sum of money was involved. As a matter of fact there was—more than ten millions.

"Now, here is where we take an abstract problem and establish the identity of the actors in it. The will was signed by compulsory forgery—if I may use the phrase—by an utter stranger. It was signed by a man who could not possibly have known the handwriting of the man whose name he wrote, and moreover by a man who was in a condition that makes it preposterous

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to imagine that he even attempted to sign that name. Yet the will was signed, and obviously the conspirators had to have a signature that could stand inspection. Now, what have we?"

The Thinking Machine paused and sat silent for a moment. Detective Mallory glowered professionally; Guerrin's face was impassive. The girl glanced at him from time to time incredulously.

"When a person is incapable of signing his or her name, physically or by reason of no education, the law accepts a cross mark as a signature when properly witnessed," the scientist went on. "We know that Mr. Richards could not have known or imitated the signature of the old man he impersonated. But he did sign—therefore, it must have been a cross mark which could be established in a court of law. Do you see now how I proved the identity of the persons in this fraud? I got the date of the incident from Mr. Richards. Then a trip to the Surrogate's Office told me all I wanted to know. What will had been filed for probate about that date which bore a cross mark as a signature? The records answered the question instantly. It was the will of John Wallace Lawrence.

"I glanced over the will. It specifically allowed Hilda Fanshawe a trivial five thousand dollars a year, and yet she was the adopted daughter of John Lawrence. Do you see how the joints begin to fit together? Further, the will left the bulk of the property to a Mr. Howard Guerrin, to a Mrs. Francis —since deceased, by the way—and to a Mr. Frank Hughes. The joints continued to fit nicely, and the problem was solved. It was an easy matter to locate these people once I knew their names. I found Howard Guerrin — Mr. Richards knew him as Mr. Hillman—at his home in Cambridge and asked him a few pertinent questions—perhaps I should say a few impertinent questions. From the fact that he locked me up in a room of his house and kept me a prisoner for two days, I was convinced that he was one of the conspirators. And so it proves."

Again there was silence. Then Detective Mallory asked a question.

"Where was John Wallace Lawrence when all this was happening?"

"Let us put it this way. Miss Fanshawe had been in Europe and was rushing home knowing that her foster father was dying," The Thinking Machine explained. "As a matter of fact, when she landed the real Mr. Lawrence was dead. He had died the day before, and the farce had been arranged for her benefit at the moment his body lay in an upstairs room. He was buried two days later, and Miss Fanshawe attended his funeral. There was no reason why she should have suspected anything — all the details

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were very cleverly taken care of. Of course, the cross mark on the will could possibly have been detected as fraudulent by an expert *if* Miss Fanshawe had suspected fraud. But she did not.

"I don't know the provisions of John Lawrence's real will, but I daresay it left everything to his adopted daughter. The five thousand dollars a year allowance to her in the substitute will was merely a sop to forestall possible legal action."

"And you were held prisoner, you say?" Detective Mallory asked.

"For two days in an inside room on the second floor of this man Guerrin's house," The Thinking Machine snapped, "and a very stupid thing to do, since it was practically an acknowledgment of guilt. But when he found out that someone knew of the plot to steal Miss Fanshawe's inheritance, he began immediately to make arrangements to get out of the country, taking Miss Fanshawe along. She is now his secretary, so it was a simple matter to arrange to take her with him. Detective Cunningham caught them on a boat about to sail for England and brought them here. I was rescued by Mr. Hatch and a very clever gentleman named Bates from the room where I was kept prisoner. We had to be careful in escaping as the servants were in the house, and they might have had drastic orders about me.

"I should add that I neither slept nor swallowed a mouthful of food while I was a prisoner. Mr. Guerrin was good enough to send me very appetizing-looking meals, but I couldn't take the risk of being poisoned. And I didn't sleep because I was trying to get out. At last, I managed to get a letter to Mr. Hatch, and that brought results."

At that moment the door of the room was opened and a uniformed officer entered.

"Mr. Richards to see Professor Van Dusen," he announced.

Immediately behind the officer came Mr. Richards in person. He paused in the doorway and stared at Guerrin for a moment.

"Why, hello Hallman," he said pleasantly. Then his eyes fell on the girl, and a flash of recognition lighted them.

"Permit me," said The Thinking Machine, "Miss Fanshawe, Mr. Richards. You have met before. This is the gentleman, Miss Fanshawe, whom you saw die." He turned to Detective Mallory. "Mr. Mallory, I asked Mr. Richards to come here to identify Howard Guerrin as the man who robbed Miss Fanshawe of her rightful inheritance."

"And where is Frank Hughes?" the detective wanted to know.

"In South Africa," replied The Thinking Machine. "I learned that while I was a prisoner. In fact, I learned a great deal that is not relevant to this problem."

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That evening, when Hatch was writing the story for his newspaper, a frown appeared on his brow. He went to the telephone and called The Thinking Machine.

"If you were so closely guarded as a prisoner, Professor?" he asked, "how on earth did you manage to mail that letter to me?"

"That was a stroke of good luck, Mr. Hatch," the professor replied. "Yes, a very satisfying piece of luck."

For a wild moment the reporter thought he detected a faint tone of amusement in the perpetually irritated voice.

"How's that, sir?"

"Guerrin came into the room to say a few unpleasant things to me. He put down some letters on a table near me—letters he evidently intended to mail. He started to examine his revolver—that was to intimidate me. My letter to you was already written and stamped, and I had it in my pocket. I was still trying to devise a way to mail it. I staggered against the table and slipped my letter among his while his attention was on the revolver and not on me. Obviously, it was he who mailed my letter. Ironic, wasn't it? . . . Oh, yes, Mr. Hatch, I always carry stamps—for an emergency. They come in handy sometimes."

Hatch burst out laughing.

NEXT MONTH . . .

KEM BENNETT's *The Flight of the Bumblebee*
(a new Christmas story)

FREDERICK NEBEL's *The Fifth Question*

HELEN NIELSEN's *Won't Somebody Help Me?*

AGATHA CHRISTIE's *The Sign in the Sky*

THOMAS WALSH's *The Second Chance*

VINCENT STARRETT's *The Tragedy of Papa Ponsard*

CRAIG RICE's *The Man Who Swallowed a Horse*

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a new story by

JOHN COLLIER

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**JOHN COLLIER**
TITLE:	***The Love Connoisseur***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	Monte Carlo
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*A witty, satirical, outrageous, delightful "mad caper" by a modern master of "fancies and goodnights"...It has that touch!*

IT IS NOT GIVEN TO EVERY MAN TO realize the most cherished ambition of his barefoot boyhood. "Yet here I am," thought Harvey Macrcevey, "exactly what I longed to be so long ago—an adventurer in the shadow of a palm!"

He had to admit that the palm in question was not spreading its frondage on a tropic or treasure isle. It stood, in fact, and in a tub, in the lounge of the Grand Casino Hotel at Monte Carlo. Harvey consoled himself with the reflection that the Grand Casino Hotel is by no means a bad place for an adventurer. It may be thought that Harvey was a little over-optimistic on this point. The truth is, over-optimism was his weakness. He was no longer as young as one would wish to be, and he seldom had a very precise idea as to whom his next meal was coming from. Nevertheless, he always looked on the bright side, and he thought of nothing but love and the lucky chance.

His views on the tender passion were not entirely frivolous. He considered himself to be ripe for a last and lasting attachment. "I have reached the time of life," said he, "when, as far as that game is concerned, a man is playing for keeps."

Harvey had nothing against puppy love. Calf love, first love, second, third, fourth love and so forth—all had had his hearty approval. Nevertheless, he had found

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them to be little more than beautiful bubbles fated to burst, sometimes with a disconcerting bang. "They were billows of joy," said he, "and it was only natural that they should subside and be succeeded by other billows. All the same, they were absolutely wonderful, with the unfortunate exception of Mrs. Oliphant. But after all, they were, to put it in a word, *they*. As such, they inevitably fell short of the majestic and monumental quality of the ultimate and abiding love of a lifetime, which, to put it in another word, should be *It*."

As to what constituted *It*, Harvey had what he chose to call his ideals. These had changed very considerably in the course of the years. The statuesque form of a Miss Bjornstrom, blonde goddess of the "blackboard jungle" where Harvey had spent that barefoot boyhood, was out. Youth, dimples, giggles, even a wiggle or two, were in. Harvey had become more mature, and, as if nature had determined to restore the balance, his ideals had become less so. In youth he had abhorred babies and despised dolls; now, to make perhaps the greatest understatement of all time, he did not.

Very well, there was Harvey, sitting in the shelter of his palm tree, leaning back in his chair, running over these ideals in his mind. His eyes were half closed; a tender, rather wistful smile was playing its lonely little game on his lips. Harvey dwelt lovingly upon all sorts of agreeable particulars, just as other connoisseurs arrange, catalogue, and caress their books, bric-a-brac, bibelots, etc. Suddenly his mellowing smile vanished and was replaced by the expression of a man who can't believe his own inner eye. Now this organ is said to be the bliss of solitude, and no oculist can fit it with a monocle if it should happen to develop astigmatism.

Harvey had suddenly realized that the ideals he was conjuring up in fancy were not his own at all. You may be sure he stopped fondling them at once for fear they might be someone else's ideals, somehow strayed into his head. Yet, when he took another peep at them, he realized they were *almost* his own, only better. It was a matter, perhaps, of only a quarter of an inch here, maybe half an inch there—but the general effect was unquestionably better.

Now Harvey had spent a great deal of time working out his concept of perfection, and he not unnaturally wanted to know where this inspired revision came from. "It has either risen, like Venus from the sea, from the depths of my evidently rather saline unconscious," said he to himself, "or it has been prompted by some exterior stimulus. Is it possible that my inner eye can be taking dictation, so to speak, from my two half-closed outer ones?"

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Harvey eagerly opened these to their fullest extent, and at once had to narrow them again to prevent them popping out of his head. Sitting at a table on the other side of his sheltering palm was the almost identical twin of the girl he had been dreaming of. But this one had the immense advantage of being even more of a dream, and, on top of that, the still greater advantage of not being a dream at all. "What a contradictory little creature she is!" thought Harvey fondly. The fact is, he had fallen in love at first sight, and this was a love so sweet and so passionate as to be better imagined than described. Perhaps it had better not even be imagined except by those who are rather unimaginative.

It may be said, however, that this love was a cross between a very expensive Valentine and a well upholstered electric chair. Harvey fastened upon this delightful creature a gaze of such intensity that had anyone walked between them he would have gone off like an electronic burglar alarm. For a moment Harvey had the impression that he was smoking his cigarette in a holder, which was something he never did. He found that his lips were shyly protruding themselves in the direction of his beloved, like those of a chimpanzee who is offered a piece of sugar.

"Oh, if she were indeed my sugar and I were her daddy!" thought Harvey, and at once began to ponder on his chances of arranging this delectable state of affairs. It has been declared a great misfortune to love and not to be rich. The girl who had come to mean so much to Harvey was quite a simple little thing, but there was that about her—it was, in fact, her dress—which suggested that simple little things could be rather expensive.

Harvey felt he had not the power to tear his eyes away, to rush out and acquire a million dollars, just like that. "I should be away too long," he said to himself. "I should miss her too excruciatingly. And suppose she was not here when I got back! Of course, it would be wonderful if I *did* get back in time, and found her waiting for me. I can just see myself coming through the big doorway there, looking around for her, seeing her, waving, smiling. . . . !" But at this point Harvey, who had previously doubted his inner eye, found himself unable to believe his outer ones, for that is exactly what he did see. Harvey saw himself, or a very convincing imitation thereof, appear in the doorway, waving, riding that wave all the way across the lounge, flashing a smile from it, breaking out a white, dental gleam on its very crest. He saw his dream girl smiling up at the heart-breaker who now hung over her.

"Hello, sugar!" said his unreasonable facsimile.

"Hello, daddy!" said his dream-ideal.

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"My very own words!" thought Harvey. "It must be myself in person. Look at me—patting her cheek, sitting down beside her, eyeing her as if she's mine from top to toe!" He soon realized, however, that the other man was doing the eyeing and he himself only the looking. There is all the difference in the world. "Either I have gone completely mad," thought Harvey, "or I'm just the wrong half of a couple of sane, well-balanced, thoroughly normal ringers."

Harvey had heard that everyone in the world has, somewhere or other, his double. What made him furious was the way his double had come butting in just when Harvey had found, give or take a quarter of an inch here, a half an inch there, his ideal. "There is only one consolation," thought he. "At least it shows she likes my type."

This was all very well, except that her affection was just a little misplaced. She stroked the intruder's hand; she gave that very wiggle of which Harvey considered himself to be the original and most appreciative choreographer; she smiled at his detestable duplicate for all the world like an adorable little canary smiling at a great, fat Persian cat. "You know, daddy," she said, "you're looking a little bit tired."

"Maybe, sweetie. I guess it's all the fun we've been having."

"Yes, daddy, we've certainly been having a lot of fun, haven't we?"

"If that fellow is as much like me as he looks," thought Harvey, grinding his teeth, "that sort of fun had better be put a stop to, and without delay!" He could have kicked himself—preferably his other self—out of sheer jealousy. He was more than ever convinced that this girl was making a tragic mistake. He watched uneasily as she poured out the fellow's coffee, putting in three lumps of sugar. Now, Harvey took only two in his, and the puritan in him was revolted by this coarse, sensual streak in his rival.

"You sure love your sugar, don't you, daddy?"

"Yes, sweetie, I certainly love my sugar."

Only an Irving or a Barrymore, incapacitated by a sprained ankle, watching his understudy give a lumpish and spiritless rendering of Romeo's most passionate speech—only such a one could form even a remote idea of how Harvey felt at this moment. He could have brought such vibrant intensity, such depth, such nuance to that simple, moving line, of which, again like the actors in question, he regarded himself as to all intents and purposes the author. Instead, he was forced to sit by and hear it mumbled and thrown away!

"Romance is not his long suit," thought Harvey, "and neither is the one he is wearing." Here Harvey showed excellent taste; his rival was clad in one of those very expensive suits by a bad tailor,

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whose function it is to proclaim the success of the small-town businessman. There are tongues in trees, books in the running brooks; in this suit there was the equivalent of a Dun and Bradstreet rating which said, "A million dollars."

"By God!" said Harvey. "First my girl, then my line, and now my million dollars!" It will be remembered that he had had it in mind to acquire exactly this sum, in order to support his beautiful doll in the style to which he imagined her to be accustomed. "What's more," thought he, "this fellow has the million, not in mind; as I had, but in his pocket—in the pocket of a suit I wouldn't be found dead in!"

"And yet," he admitted to himself candidly, "I'd give anything to be in his shoes, always providing, of course, that they are 8 D's."

"And especially," he added, with perhaps a touch of utilitarianism, "if I were alive and kicking."

"Except, of course," he concluded with commendable realism, "if I were in his shoes I wouldn't have anything to kick about."

There is a point in all great tragedy where motive, newly born, standing alone and rather aghast at itself, is suddenly joined by opportunity. Then the fun begins. Harvey's reflections were just hanging about in his head like idlers waiting for a poolroom to open, when he heard the following words:

"Honey, I think I'll just take a last stroll in the Casino gardens. I'll smoke a cigar, watch the moon rise, and maybe pick up a few memories to take back to the States with us. Want to come along?"

"No, thank you, daddy. I think I'll sit here and wait for my darling."

"That," thought Harvey, is where you're going to get the biggest surprise in your life, which, however, I hope you will not even notice, except by way of the slowly growing realization that your darling is a damned sight more of a darling then he ever was before."

So unobtrusively Harvey slipped from behind his palm tree and sneaked out the side door of the hotel. He proceeded, not at first to the gardens, but to the Casino itself. He went up to his usual table, where he was well-known to the croupiers, who, by the way, regarded him as a piker. Even so, they were impressed by the desperate, devil-may-care swagger he put on, and they exchanged glances which said, as plainly as glances may, "His nibs is looking rather tense this evening. No doubt he is gambling his last sou."

Pretty soon they raked in the sou in question. Harvey obliged them with a little laugh, at once brittle, light, hollow, very dry, and with just one part in seven of world-weary heartbreak in it, and the merest dash of bitter, steely resolve. The significance of a laugh

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of this sort is well understood at the tables, and when they heard it the croupiers fingered their black ties nervously.

Harvey made his exit in excellent style. Fathers pointed him out to their sons. "That is the way to do it," they said, "when the time comes as, system or no system, sooner or later it must."

Harvey now took the turn which led to the gardens behind the Casino. These gardens are rich in exotic plants and pearl-handled revolvers; in these post-war days the latter are not always gathered up as carefully as they should be when the bodies of heavy lovers are removed at dawn. Harvey glanced about in the fading light and soon found one in which five unexpended cartridges testified to the prodigality of its late owner. He then esconced himself in the fleshy foliage of a large succulent which grew on the rock overhanging the little path which leads up from the lower terrace.

Soon he heard a carefree whistle. "The man," thought he, "who could indulge in a carefree whistle at this stage of his affairs must either be completely lacking in perception or singularly indifferent to his fate. This relieves the old-fashioned, unadventurous part of my mind from any guilt feeling that may be lurking there." Without more ado, he leaned over and lifted the fellow's hat from his head. He did so partly on a frugal impulse, to avoid spoiling a useful piece of haberdashery, and partly because he felt that there is that in the presence of which any man would prefer to stand uncovered.

"Have you, by any chance," said he, "any birthmarks?"

"No," said the other, startled into complete frankness. "Not so much as a mole." Then, staring up at Harvey, he added, "But who the hell are you?"

Harvey felt that any attempt at an explanation would produce only bitterness and antagonism, so he very gently pulled the trigger of his little pearl-handled pistol. The pop was lost among numerous others which were sounding in the shadowy recesses of the gardens, for it hapened to be a night on which the bank was doing extremely well. Not wishing to obstruct the path, he rolled the deceased into a retired spot behind a large organ cactus which stood nearby. It may be of interest to music lovers to note that Harvey, whose tautened sensibilities were strung up to a sort of high fi, had a strong impression that the basso profundo of this superb plant was playing *The End of a Perfect Day,* while *The Voice That Breathed O'er Eden* came stealing in over the vox celeste. He felt they went together extremely well.

However, there was no time to indulge in estheticisms. Harvey hastily exchanged his own well-worn pinstripe for the suit that had

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aroused his contempt. He at once noticed something which might have meant little to a person of coarser fiber, but which was of immense importance to one like himself, who had a very delicate sense of right and wrong: this suit was a shade tight around the shoulders and chest, and just a little loose about the waist. The difference amounted to no more than a quarter of an inch here, and perhaps half an inch there, but it will be remembered that *these were exactly the differences between his dream girl and his real dream girl.* "It proves I am Mr. Right," said he exultantly. "It proves that she and I were made for each other. If not, there's a hell of a misunderstanding somewhere."

Some people say that homicide, even at its neatest and most successful, is inclined to induce qualms, apprehension, remorse, and other unpleasant sensations. Harvey experienced nothing of the kind. "I feel fine," said he to himself. "In fact, I feel a new man, and with all the advantages of both the old ones. For one thing, I am me; for another, I shall soon have the girl and the million dollars."

He strode back toward the hotel, eager to possess himself of the two last-mentioned items. "It is a pity," thought he, "that we haven't rather more memories and associations in common. It would help conversationally, for example, if I knew what our name is, assuming that we are married, or the address of our love nest, if we happen to be living in sin. However, I am an adventurer and therefore fully prepared to ad lib."

By this time he was beside his beloved, who, by the way, gratified him with the gleam of a golden circlet, as she patted his hand.

"Hello, sugar," said Harvey.

"Hello, daddy!" replied the dream girl.

Harvey congratulated himself on the fluency and smoothness of the dialogue so far, but at this point he began to feel some little difficulty in continuing. Happy the man whose woman, though she may be little more than a slip of a girl, can inspire him in the moment of his need.

"Why, daddy! What's all this dust on your coat? Don't say you fell down! Don't say you've hurt yourself!"

Her tender concern not only gave Harvey the delicious sense of being loved and accepted, it also gave him an idea. "Baby doll," said he, "I was thinking things over, down there in the Casino gardens. I was thinking about you; I was thinking about me, and from that somehow I got to thinking about us. And . . . well, I felt I just had to do some exercises."

"Why, daddy! Whatever for?"

"Just to broaden my chest a bit, sweetie, and take maybe half an inch off my waist. I did it for you. I want you to be proud of me, and

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I hope you notice the improvement. However, these exercises pepped me up so much that in the end I did a few cartwheels out of sheer *joie de vivre*. And—you'll think me an awful fool—I forgot to put my hands down."

"You silly old daddy! You'll be forgetting your head next!"

"Exactly what I did, sweetie! You've hit it right on the button. How clever of you to have guessed it! How well we know each other! How wonderfully close we are! Well, as I was about to say, it jarred up my brains a bit. It's given me just a touch of amnesia, darling, of the sort the stars used to have in the movies. Would you mind briefing me a little as to who we are, what we're doing here, how we got here, and all that sort of thing?"

"But if you've got amnesia, daddy, how come you remember a lot of late-show movie stars?"

"Well, maybe they gave unforgettable performances, honey."

"But if you don't know how we got here, you don't remember me on TV!"

Harvey hesitated. "Pardon me if I seem a little absent-minded," said he, "I was lost in adoration of your pout. But we were discussing your television career and my memory. Think for a moment, darling, of a Swiss cheese of the finest quality—how there are holes in it here and there arranged according to no particular plan. Those holes are about the same size as the pebbles on that path down through the gardens, and that's the way it is with my memory."

"You can remember a lousy old Swiss cheese, but you can't remember me on TV! You can't remember me winning the TV wedding and the honeymoon in Monte Carlo?"

"Don't be cross with me, darling. Now you mention it, it's beginning to come back to me."

"And the new outfits and the luggage and the plane tickets and the hotel expenses and one hundred dollars each to change into francs to gamble with in the Casino!"

"We were not too proud to take even that, my love; we accepted it as a humble tribute to your beauty, wit, and charm."

"We grabbed it as quick as we could, daddy, just like you grabbed the vacation the Department of Sanitation gave you so you could come along too."

"It may be just the unfortunate assonance," said Harvey, "but I must say those words, 'vacation' and 'sanitation,' grate upon my ear. I have of course the highest regard for the department in question; without it, the garbage would never be collected, and would no doubt stink abominably."

"Well, daddy, you ought to know."

"But the way you refer to it, my love, is incompatible with an impression I have of financial holdings amounting to one million dol-

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lars. Something seemed to tell me of them. In fact, it was this very suit I'm wearing. Don't say I'm making it up out of whole cloth!"

"Why, daddy, that's the suit the TV people bought you, so you could look smart in Monte Carlo. They bought me a complete Blushing Bride Outfit, and Irwin a complete Lucky Bridegroom Outfit, and they bought you a new suit and Mom a new dress so you could both come along and have a second honeymoon while we were having ours."

Harvey brooded over the implications of these words. "I showed amazing insight," said he to himself, "when I envisaged the possibility of there being a hell of a misunderstanding somewhere. I wonder if this Mom is one of those moms who are taken to be the sisters, even the twins, of their own teenage daughters. Allowing a quarter of an inch here, maybe half an inch there, on account of the ravages of the years . . ." This was the last expiring flicker of Harvey's over-optimism, for at that moment a voice addressed him from behind. "Henry," it said, "I don't know if it's your idea of a second honeymoon to sit gabbing in the lounge with Maureen while Irwin's waiting for her to go dancing and I'm waiting for you upstairs."

Harvey turned at once, and saw a lady in a dress that had very obviously been given away on a TV show. He did not like the style of this dress, even less the content.

"Good heavens!" thought he, "this lady could never be anyone's twin—there just wouldn't be room enough. What seems at once extraordinary and inevitable is that my late counterpart must have had the same ideals as myself, even in the days of our unshod adolescence. This lady, in those now distant years, must have closely resembled the statuesque Miss Bjornstrom, whom I idolized when I was in the eighth grade. She might still be called statuesque, but only if one had in mind a backward disciple of Mr. Gutzon Borglum, working on a small leftover mountain, or, judging by her rather impatient expression, on an all too lightly slumbering volcano. Of course, I can explain everything, but if I do so it will provoke an eruption. The authorities will be brought in and . . ."

"Did you hear what I said to you, Henry?" inquired the lady.

"Yes, I did, my dear," said he, "and I am coming at once."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WILLIAM FAY**

TITLE: ***Some Days You Can't Make a Dollar***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Lieutenant Ed Logan

LOCALE: Bronx, New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *About a TV film producer who "wasn't too bad and wasn't too good, who believed in nothing and lived in a kind of moral limbo" —and who had a weakness for women and poker. Things happen to a man like that.*

LOGAN, THE DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT, wore his best suit of clothes and he felt stickily self-conscious. It seemed to him a man with any self-respect would not be standing here at the hotel entrance, waiting and hoping for a charitable greeting from the girl in the camel's-hair coat.

"That's Rita?" a detective named Fiari asked. "That's the woman in your life?"

"In my past," Logan corrected him. "Away past, Joe."

"Well, she looks real nice."

"Thanks," Logan said.

Really all you could see at this distance were her tallness and the easy grace of her stride. She was coming through a park on the far side of the Grand Concourse, walking slowly with a man named Chandler Garth. Logan loved her; that's all he knew, and he would probably eat any crumbs of kindness she was willing to bestow at their first meeting in seven years. He pitied himself for the smallness of his shame. It was gray October and the wind was strong. The maple trees wore yellow crowns and gave their leaves begrudgingly

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to the wind that swept the park.

"This Chandler Garth is ready money," Fiari said. "He's quick with a buck and very few women hate him, except his wives."

"I didn't ask you to rummage in his business, Joe."

"That's part of our friendly service," said Fiari, a benignly impudent man. Logan's rise to a lieutenancy had not affected their relationship. "A guy in your position is entitled to know the score," Fiari said. "You'd do the same for me."

Logan almost wished the other detective hadn't come along right now, so chock-full of volunteer facts and figures. But he didn't argue with Fiari. He had known him too long, he liked him too well, and, in his loneliness, he had confided much to the man he worked with, day after routine day. According to Fiari, Mr. Chandler Garth, of Odyssey Film Productions, had arrived in New York with Rita Landers two weeks before, having suspended operations in Hollywood.

"Did he have to pick the Bronx?" Logan asked.

"I don't know. Probably he couldn't rent anything in Manhattan. That's the way it is with all these television studios. They pop up in Queens or Brooklyn and now the Bronx, any place where the real estate isn't fifty per cent uranium. This Odyssey outfit's all set to do two dramatic shows and a whole flock of filmed commercials. Garth is the boss and the girl—hey, the closer she gets the better she looks—well, she works for him."

"You mean she writes television scripts, don't you?"

"That's not what I heard. They told me she works for Garth. She handles all his personal affairs. I didn't see her at the studio, but I got talkin' to the help. You say she used to write things for the radio?"

"She was doing that 'Uncle Bunny Bedtime' thing for kids when she left for the coast in '48. She had lots of literary friends. I remember in school she was always doing fancy compositions."

"Were they any good?"

"No—terrible," Logan said with regret, "but I could be wrong."

"Just the same, she is a classy-lookin' doll."

Logan didn't say anything. It wasn't easy to stand here, determined to be seen, yet fearful of the meeting. Suppose Rita didn't want to see him? What would he do then? He'd die inside himself like a strangled trout. Yet, knowing Rita, he was certain she'd be kind. He didn't expect her to recall the old days with any flood of sweet nostalgia that remotely matched his own. Nor was she exactly a girl any more; she was a woman now; it was half their lives ago that he first took her to a high school dance.

"I think she sees you," Fiari said then. "She don't look mad about it, either. Good luck."

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Mr. Chandler Garth, of Odyssey Films, had never, so far as he knew, been in the Bronx before, unless it were in transit to New England. People said this was unavoidable, but they were much too snide about it, he thought, because he liked the Bronx real well, and he was neither dumb nor a snob. He liked things that were serviceable to his comfort and his practical designs. Here in the Bronx the rental price of a modern studio had proven exactly right. In the fourteen days since operations had begun he had not been bothered by his current wife or any of his previous ones. The Boulevard Arms Hotel, facing the Grand Concourse, was as pleasant and need-fulfilling as the nearby studio. The uptown air was purer than Manhattan's air by several tons of floating dust — that much the Bronx Chamber of Commerce had made plain.

"Wait a minute, Chan—please wait," the girl beside him said excitedly. "It must be—certainly it's Eddie!"

Mr. Garth's secretary had spoken with a hushed, romantic breathlessness she had never before displayed. Considering his own repeated failures with this virtuous and strictly arm's-length blonde, it was surprising to see her go rushing like a flushed gazelle to grasp the extended hands of the large, hardly beautiful man who was standing on the curb. It could be the Bronx air, Mr. Garth supposed, but in any case it was reassuring to find her capable of responding in this way. Then, not believing it graceful to linger, he went into the hotel.

It was Saturday, about noon. Chandler Garth walked into the cocktail lounge and placed a large film container on the bar. He had a martini—one martini, then he ate some cheese-bits from a bowl. The house detective, whose name was Phillips, came into the bar. He was a massively built, soft-treading man, and an interesting thief to know. Mr. Phillips had some cheese-bits and a glass of seltzer which the bartender poured with distaste. The bartender walked away and Phillips said to Mr. Garth:

"How many will there be?"

"Six players, myself included."

"You'll want things sent up—same as last week?"

"Probably coffee and sandwiches and a bucket of ice. I don't have to bribe a gumshoe to phone 'room service,' do I?"

"No, sir; but with the kind of money you play for, and the kind of people you'll have sittin' in—one guy a known bookmaker—it just don't jibe with the penal law. That's why you pay me."

Chandler Garth, who enjoyed playing honest cards in skilled, frankly professional company, gave Phillips twenty dollars. Mr. Phillips peeked at the folded bill and was not impressed. "This is for protection, friend? Or for the first pot of coffee?"

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"Get out of here."

Phillips smiled and so did Garth. A certain amount of spirited rascality gave flavor to the events of any day, in Garth's opinion. That's why it always puzzled him when a girl as intelligent and attractive as Rita Landers carried virtue to fanatic lengths. It would be a matter of no consequence to him if she were stupid, glum, or undesirable. But that wasn't the case. He watched her coming into the bar —alone. She looked buoyantly pleased. Garth felt the first twinge of jealous regret he had known in years. He disliked himself for it.

"Who was the guy?"

"An old friend," Rita said. "A nice friend. Someone special, Chan. We went to school together."

"I can believe it. You've still got that ring-around-the-rosy look in your eyes."

"What of it?"

"Nothing of it. I'd just like to congratulate the paragon who can get a rise out of you. What is he, anyhow—a boy scout leader? An evangelist?"

"He's a cop," Rita said.

"A—what?"

"A policeman. A lieutenant of detectives. No 'Sergeant Friday,' but the real thing—flesh and blood and maybe a hundred and forty dollars a week. He's for me, I hope, and it's not something I thought up in the last five minutes. 'Uncle Bunny's Bedtime' show," she added derisively. "I really should have had my head examined back then."

"I think you're crazy right now," he said.

"Because the price isn't right? Is that what you mean?" She accepted the daiquiri the bartender had prepared. She had shrugged off her coat and handed it to Garth, who folded it and placed it on a chair. As little as she approved of him, they were friends and equals, and her ease with him was complete. This was because she wasn't looking for anything, he realized. Her literary ambitions had disappeared with Uncle Bunny. Examining her talents and finding them limp, she had been satisfied to forget them. "His name is Logan—Eddie Logan," she said wistfully. "He was always gentle. He was always nice. He could lick any kid on Alexander Avenue."

"He sure didn't talk to you for long outside."

"He's working, and he's not the brassy type. He's going to phone me tonight—after eight, when he's free. We'll probably go for a walk and have a hot pastrami sandwich."

"I can't afford to lose you to a dumb cop, Rita."

"You can afford to lose a lot of things," she told him, "and you probably will, so don't ever say 'dumb cop' to me again. You'll lose your shirt and your studio and your fourth wife if you keep playing poker with that same little tankful of sharks you had up here last week."

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"You think so, dear?"

"They won't be coming for the subway ride." She picked up her coat and indicated the box on the bar. "This is for the Hartley Agency, isn't it? Do you want it mailed?"

"No—young Hartley's coming by to pick it up—either before or after the theater, so he and the old man can run it off at home tomorrow. There's only four hundred feet and one commercial on the big reel, but they want to see what we've got. I'm going to run it off once more before my guests arrive."

"Then you won't need me?"

"Only to see that Hartley gets this when he comes for it. I'd like you to type out a copy of our production schedule to give him. Any time before eight. I'll leave the film upstairs."

He watched her walk off with a blithe display of happiness that made him feel less endowed than he was willing to concede. Ah, well, he thought, to each his compensations. He picked up the film box and left the bar. The elevator took him to the seventh floor.

When it was almost eight o'clock, in the 44th Precinct, Bronx, Lieutenant Logan began to pluck the pins from a newly purchased shirt. He had never been a very stylish man. Even so, while buttoning the shirt, and tucking the tails in his trousers, he began to inspect the bow tie worn by Detective Fiari.

"Is that the kind you hook on, Joe? A ready-made?"

"It's a tie-it-yourself," Fiari said, "and it cost two dollars." He undid the tie. "You want to buy it or rent it?"

"No," Logan said. "It's too pretty."

"You'll look bad, anyhow," he was reminded, "and you won't be able to blame it on a necktie. You look numb as a frozen grapefruit, right this minute."

"What about it?"

Fiari shrugged. "It'll pass," he said. "Here—button your collar and raise your chin. You'll look nice in a bow tie." Fiari, swift and expert with his hands, stepped back, admiring. "Mmmm," he said, "you're gorgeous. Go look in the mirror."

"I'll take your word."

"She gave you the real big 'hello,' didn't she?"

Logan tried to be casual. "It was all right," he said. "It was better than it figured to be, after so many years." But he couldn't disguise the way he felt. "It shouldn't have happened so easily, Joe; I'm beginning to hope for real."

The other cop, a warm, sentimental man, punched Logan's arm lightly, solemnly, and he repressed the bright remarks that he was tempted to indulge. Fiari was a good man.

"Good luck to you, boy," he said.

No one had bothered to wish good luck to Chandler Garth who

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by the evidence at hand was not in need. He had drawn such fantastic cards in big league company that by eight o'clock his guests had prudently departed. He wasn't sure of how much money he had won, although he could almost estimate it from their recent and anguished farewells. All he knew was that the bulk of the money, in 50s, 20s and 10s, comprised the kind of figure which, if mentioned airily, would sound like the smoking room exaggeration of a fool in search of prestige. Mr. Garth didn't feel he needed that kind of applause.

"Yes?" he said. Because the door had opened in the anteroom. He was aware the film case, resting on a table there, and destined for the Hartley Agency, had not been picked up. "Rita?"

It wasn't Rita. It was Phillips, the house detective, putting his keys back in his pocket. Garth watched him carefully, coolly.

"What do you want?"

Mr. Phillips walked through the reception hall and into the large sitting room where Garth and his profits were equally conspicuous. Garth didn't get the same impression of genial rascality he had found so amusing in this man at other times. Cigar smoke still hung heavy in the room. The ice cubes in a metal bucket on the floor had turned to water. Nothing enriched the room as greatly as the money in clear view.

The house detective was sensitive to it. "You did real good, huh?"

"I did all right, in my way, if it's any of your business," Garth replied. "Here's fifty dollars. Now get out of here. You're bought and paid for."

Phillips's smile had faded, but his mouth remained moist at the corners. His breathing was heavy. He came closer. It was as though the money, so green and abundant, in orderly stacks, had the power to draw him on.

"A lot of it, isn't there?" Phillips said. "I saw your hot-shot friends goin' out through the lobby, like I told you they should go—two at a time, then Hennessey, the bookmaker, all by himself. I figured the way they looked that they left somethin' up here more than their cigar butts." Phillips reached for one stack of 50s and let them separate and fall like leaves. "We'll split it in half, you and me." His powerful hand was sweaty as a sponge. "This way you don't go to jail under that section seven-nine-oh of the penal law I mentioned to you before."

Garth hit at the heavy, possessive hand, but Phillips only laughed at him. Garth rose in fury and tried to strike the big man's face. Phillips fended the blow then slapped Garth's cheek with contemptuous, rebuking ease. The equation of rich man and purchased flunkey had been erased. Garth wasn't a coward, but the

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coldness of fear was in him. He could feel the hatred of the powerful man he had openly despised. In their close struggle he tried to knee Phillips in the groin. A strong hand smashed his mouth. Garth wanted to scream, but pride prevented him. How like a hundred TV dramas of his own and others' contrivance was this real and terrible experience. *God help me,* he thought in strange appeal to something in which he did not believe. He tried to trip Phillips then, to break from his smothering grasp. They went down together—Garth and the full, free-falling weight of the other man; something crashed into his skull and that was all for Chandler Garth . . .

Phillips, having climbed to his feet, looked down at the result of their struggle. The silver-plated bucket was overturned; the mouth of it was visibly bent; the water ran on the carpeting; and Chandler Garth was dead. Nothing kept him from prudent flight but the money so irresistibly there. He fought his nerves enough to realize it still was possible, were he discovered here, to claim this was the way he'd found the body. As a house detective, observing Garth's departing guests—among them a known bookmaker—it would have been his right to investigate. But he couldn't claim this if his own clothes bulged with a dead man's money.

He began to search for something in which the money could be placed, then hidden away—not here, of course—not in this suite of rooms the cops would comb like the Commissioner's cat, but somewhere—the empty suite next door, perhaps—squeezed tight behind the grooves of a radiator, or secreted in some other, better place, until time had made it safe. He pressed the money into a single bulk, then kept it in his hands, like a man holding fast to a football. In the anteroom, on the surface of a table there, he saw a carton not less than fourteen inches square and several inches deep. He put the money down and opened the canvas straps that crisscrossed on the box. It was clearly labeled HARTLEY AND HARTLEY, with a mid-Manhattan address.

He removed the metal film case that rested snugly in the carton. He replaced it with the 50s, 20s, 10s and scattered 5s, pressing them tightly, making them fit, closing the straps, then testing the total weight. It seemed neither heavier nor lighter than the container of film he now raised in his hands. He was holding the film like some tuneless tambourine, wondering what to do with it, when someone tried the door. He sprang back from the sitting room, not closing the door from the anteroom, not having time. He leaned against the intervening wall while a key turned in the outer door.

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"Chan? Are you still here, Chan?"

That was all he heard. He knew her voice. Then she was gone, the door closing firmly. It was silent then and Phillips breathed more freely. Very cautiously he returned to the anteroom. The table was bare. The money was gone with the girl.

Now, if ever in his life, he believed he could kill with intent. But he didn't dare go after her. He couldn't risk being seen. Having no place to conceal the film case, he held on to it. He walked past the body of Chandler Garth to the French doors opening on a narrow terrace. He opened them. The autumn wind came from the East, full blast against him. Far below him was the hotel parking lot; beyond were the darkened bulk of a public school, some factories, the New York Central tracks. He closed the French doors against the wind, securing them. He moved warily and unseen on the narrow balcony; then he stepped over a low partition to the similar doors of the adjacent suite. He used one key from the ring of keys, but the doors were stubborn. He placed the metal film case on the balcony's ledge and succeeded in opening the doors. He reached back for the film case with a sweated hand, but he reached too quickly, too eagerly. The smooth-surfaced case slipped from his moistened fingers. He lunged for it and struck it with the butt of his hand. It went off into the darkness, falling, falling . . . He remained there, trembling, waiting to hear the crash of it . . .

"It's a great night for a murder," Logan said bitterly to one of the uniformed cops. He came down in the elevator from the seventh floor, having viewed the body of Chandler Garth. In the lobby, he draped his topcoat over the fat arm of a tufted chair. The house detective, a man named Phillips, was leaning against the desk, talking to the night clerk. A clock above their heads said it was ten minutes after nine. The homicide men were upstairs and down, so that Logan could say, at least with professional accuracy. "This case is no skin off me."

"You're not attached to homicide, Lieutenant?"

"No," Logan said to Phillips. "I'm here for laughs."

He walked over to where Rita Landers was sitting, her long legs crossed, a package held in her lap. He stood there, looking down at her, evicting from mind any unwelcome notions growing there, electing to have his heart decide what he believed about this damned mess on the seventh floor. "Come on," he said, "I'll buy you a drink." She got up and went with him into the cocktail lounge. They found a table and a waiter came over.

"I'll have a beer," he said. "Rita?"

"A beer would be fine."

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They sat near a window, well apart from other, occupied tables. They could hear the constant traffic on the Grand Concourse. The waiter returned, setting down the bottled beer and the goblets. Rita just sat there.

"You all right?" he said.

"I'll be all right."

"Well, take it easy," Logan said.

Without realizing it, against this background of police activity, he had become more secure and less self-conscious in her presence. He hadn't arrived at the Bronx's fanciest hotel until ten minutes after the police who had responded to the call. He'd been buying flowers for an important date—a $10 spread of chrysanthemums, the color of bronze and the color of wheat, though what had happened to them, Logan couldn't say. He had put them down some place and forgotten them when he heard the news from the other cops — that Chandler Garth was dead. A chambermaid had discovered the body at 8:17.

"Tough, wasn't it?" Logan said.

She was pouring beer carefully into his glass. "I think so, Eddie." Her eyes were swelled from recent tears. She wore a gay and becoming dress that was copper-toned, with a Walter Raleigh kind of collar fluffy at her throat. Black, cloth-covered buttons descended from the collar line.

"You saw him when?" Logan said.

"Around noon, as I told the sergeant. He was expecting these friends. The same names I gave. The crowd he gambled with."

"You mentioned Arthur Hennessey. We know that Arthur doesn't play for box tops, Rita. That's why they pressed you with so many questions. Naturally they'll pick up Hennessey and the others, quick as they can. They'll attempt to find out if there was any kind of an argument — cross-question these fellows separately, try to learn if Garth got clipped, for one thing. What kind of a person was he?"

"I liked him," Rita said.

Her quick response dug into Logan sharply. "I didn't ask you that," he said. "How was he—well, morally?"

"He wasn't too bad and he wasn't too good," Rita said. "He believed in nothing and he lived in a kind of moral limbo — all by himself in the middle of nothing." She raised her glance to meet Logan's own. "Judged by our parents' standards, Eddie, or the rules under which you and I grew up, Chan was pretty well bankrupt."

"They were pretty good rules."

"I didn't say they were not."

"And at eight o'clock you went to his rooms?"

"That's right. Around eight—far as I know."

"And you saw nothing? Suspected nothing?"

"In God's name, Eddie, you heard me answer these same ques-

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tions for the sergeant, didn't you? I went into the little foyer there and I picked up this box of film—the same four hundred feet of it that I'm waiting to give to a Mr. Julian Hartley. It's part of a little drama called 'A Nice Time To Die,' plus one shaving soap blurb. You want to open it and look at the pictures?"

"No," Logan said. "Of course I don't."

He hadn't meant to challenge her. He had meant only to arrange more clearly in his mind the events of the day and their proper sequence, that he might more effectively assist her.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"It's all right. I'd forgotten the film until it was almost eight o'clock. Then I remembered I had to type a production schedule for the agency and attach it. I never got around to that, but I don't imagine the Hartleys will care much now. Eddie, please, let's not debate things—not you and I."

It seemed only natural for their hands to meet and touch on the table, for the years to roll away, for his heart to swell like a blimp. He could feel the warm, almost hungry pressure of her fingers. She wept very softly and Logan's own eyes blurred. Of all silly things, he could see, distortedly reflected in a goblet of beer, the jazzy design of Fiari's tie.

"There now," she said, "I ought to be cured."

She stood up, holding the box of film. They returned to the lobby. Sergeant Meola, of homicide, was watching them. Phillips, the hotel cop, was still on the scene—an immense man, with his big jaws working overtime, talking to a uniformed cop. Rita went to the desk and asked, "Did Mr. Hartley phone?"

"No, ma'am."

The tears were gone now, but her face looked strained and tired. "If he does come, you can call me," she instructed the clerk. She turned to Logan then. "Thanks, Eddie—thanks for everything. I guess it wasn't meant to be a gay evening."

She walked quickly to one of the elevators, her head inclined, her shoulders shaking visibly. The car door closed and the indicator climbed to "4." The man named Phillips observed this with some interest. "She makes it look real respectable, don't she?"

Logan turned to him. "What do you mean?"

"She knew her way to the seventh floor real good."

Logan said with tight control, "Please tell me more."

"All I mean is—well, on my job, it don't pay to blow a whistle every ten minutes. It's not like people comin' in without any baggage to rent a room. That stuff you throw out. This was the de luxe stuff—secretary-boss stuff, with a dash of Hollywood thrown in. The 'Uptown Story,' you could call it,

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comin' to you live from the Bronx."

Logan threw a punch at the big man's mouth, but Meola caught his arm. The uniformed cop had jumped between them. Phillips backed away, the smutty smile remaining. He adjusted the lapels of his jacket, then he leaned against the desk. Sergeant Meola had maneuvered Logan carefully aside.

"Eddie, please," he said; "I know how you feel."

"I'll knock that bum through a wall."

"Some other time, Eddie, some other time. You're also a lieutenant detective and you're lousing up my job. I was going to ask you something. About that box she's been totin' around."

"It's film."

"That's what she told me."

"Well, if she said it was film, then it was film."

"Did you see for yourself that it was film?"

"Yes," Logan said, "I saw it."

The lie rather amazed him. It had been automatic, unplanned, even unintended. He wanted quickly to redeem it, but Meola had walked away to take a phone call at the desk. Logan was wondering how to phrase an explanation of his lie when the sergeant came back.

"They're driving uptown now with Hennessey and those other guys who were playing cards with Garth," Meola explained. "I'd rather see them at the station house. I'll be a while."

"Look, Frank," Logan said, "about that film."

"It was just a routine question," said Meola, "so don't get sore. I'm glad it was film, for your sake and the girl's. Hennessey told the cop that picked him up that Garth won twenty thousand dollars today—and it damned well wasn't in his rooms."

Logan felt like a man who had been hollowed out with a spoon, except for the lie that rested in him like a stone. He wanted to shout after the quick, departing figure of Meola, but he could not. Actually, he had obstructed a case. It wasn't that he failed to believe Rita's statement—after all, she had thrust the film box under his nose and invited his inspection. It was the lie that would continue to taste like a cinder, at least until Meola's return. Phillips, the house detective, had wandered off. There were homicide cops on the seventh floor and uniformed ones in the lobby. Logan, feeling stupid and extraneous, walked through the lobby and into the hotel parking area, to get some air.

The wind was big and chesty and reviving. It raised all kinds of debris with its rush. Logan, hatless, welcomed the wind. It made his cigarette glow like a sparkler on the Fourth of July. He stood there, hand in his pockets, wishing the wind would blow the dust and the doubt clear of his head. After the darkness of the day, the stars were

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fat and bright in the sky. The clouds were sweeping like gauze across the moon. A laundry truck drew away from a service platform, its exhaust raising shapeless ghosts in the cold. Late dinner guests drove from the parking lot. One long sedan pulled carefully away, mindful of the attendant's directions, careful not to scrape the cars on either side. As the wind swept big again, a kind of elaborate, tape-thin snake displayed itself in the space left by the departed car. It whirled in lazy and expanding circles. Logan, fascinated, walked the fifty feet between himself and what he saw. He stood amid the whirling tape, his heart thumping joyously. He let it wrap around his ankles and the cuffs of his pants. He tugged at a glossy length of it and almost cut his hand.

"What are you doin', Mac?"

"I'm a cop," he told the attendant.

"What is that?"

"What does it look like?"

"Film," the attendant said. "A movin' pitcher."

Logan looked up past the tiers of irregular light to the seventh floor and the clear silhouette of a cop on duty there. He went back into the hotel.

"Miss Landers is four-twenty-three, to your right," the elevator operator said.

Logan walked along the corridor and rapped on the door. There was no response, but he could hear water running into a bathtub or a sink. He rapped again, then tried the door. It didn't yield. He rapped more strongly and insistently.

"Yes?" It was Rita's voice. "Yes? Who is it?"

She opened the door. She wore a flowered housecoat and her hair was caught high with a ribbon. Her face glistened palely with foundation cream. The flow of water had stopped. She held a towel.

"You picked a bad time, Eddie. Was it so important?"

He walked past her into the compact, gracious apartment. The foyer was square. It contained an obviously spacious closet, a wrought-iron gate, a tricky, very modern chair that looked like the arched back of a cat, a narrow desk, a cradled phone. The combination living-bedroom was beyond the fancy gate. The pastel shadings and general décor did not bespeak the living quarters of a salaried secretary.

"Garth did all right by you, didn't he?"

"I don't like the way you say it, Eddie."

"I don't like it myself. Where's that box of film you had with you?"

"The what?"

"The box of film," he repeated.

"If, for any odd reason," she said, "you're playing policeman with me, Eddie, you'll find it right there on the desk. Excuse me while I get this off my face."

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"What desk?"

She turned back to him, her housecoat swirling. Impatient, puzzled, she said, "Here." And then she stopped. "At least it was here."

"What's the point of lying, Rita?"

It hurt all over. He couldn't endure it. The tall girl held the brief towel to her face. Her soft eyes searched him with a display of injured wonder which, if feigned, was the kind of art that seldom brushed the Bronx.

"Please don't cheat me or torment me, Eddie," Rita said. "Either believe what I've told you, or explain to me why the box isn't here. I tell you truthfully it was on this desk three minutes before you started hammering on the door. It had to be, unless—could someone have taken it?"

It was suddenly terribly quiet. Logan could hear his own watch like a heartbeat. He looked once more at Rita Landers as a man might look at his personal faith.

She said very softly, "As God is my Judge."

It was enough for him.

The sound they heard then was faint. It was a muted scraping, no more than that, but their glances moved in the same direction. Logan reached for his gun and motioned Rita back. He opened the closet door.

"Drop the gun," Logan said. "Drop the gun and the package too."

The man named Phillips did not intend to use the gun in his hand. The smile on his face wasn't natural because the flesh that formed the smile was quivering. His eyes were quick, appraising. They read Logan's eyes correctly. He let the small automatic drop to the floor, and then stepped forward. Then he let the film box fall.

"Some days you can't make a dollar," Logan said.

It was almost midnight when they walked together on the Grand Concourse, slowly in stride, and not saying much. Rita carried one chrysanthemum. Its flower was bronze-toned and enormous.

"The thing looks silly like that," Logan protested. "The stem's a yard long. I bought them thinking you would put them in a vase."

"You bought them and you lost them in the lobby," she said. "You dropped them like radishes. A lot you cared."

He held her arm more tightly. He was almost out of things to say. The sky was brass-button-bright above them. Ahead, they could see the lights of a kosher delicatessen.

"Everybody's luck was bad but ours," he told her gently. "It was about time, don't you think?"

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THE MAN WITH HALF A FACE

by HUGH PENTECOST

(continued from page 22)

THE WAKING-UP PROCESS WAS slow for Jane Wardman. She was aware of bright spring sunshine coming through her window. The familiar impulse to get up quickly, get Terry's and her own breakfast, and be off to the job was missing. Then, slowly, it all came back. She lay very still, staring up at the ceiling. She felt bruised, damaged, a little unclean. Facts? The facts were she had no friends —not Doris Wilson, who couldn't bear to be touched; not Paul Danning, even though he had made a courageous offer to help; not the Judge or the Doctor whom she had thought of as bulwarks of security in her life. There was no one but the strange, bitter man with the shattered face who had befriended her in trouble and had expressed some of the outrage she felt.

Beaumont had driven her and Terry home last night. He had been gentle and understanding and indignant. But even if he still felt like helping in the light of a new day, what could he do? Dr. Grant had made the position clear. The community would rather save six families from disgrace even if they were wrong, than one family, even if that one family was right. The impulse to fight had weakened in her. What was the use? There was no way to win. No way to win . . .

She got up, showered, and dressed. She delayed going downstairs because somehow she hated to tell Terry that she had thrown in the towel. The kitchen door was closed when she got downstairs. He always did this on holidays so that he could get his own breakfast early and play the radio. She opened the door and went in—and saw John Beaumont sitting at the kitchen table, smiling at her over the rim of a coffee cup.

"Good morning," he said cheerfully. He sat sideways at the table so that the scarred half of his face was concealed.

Jane felt a wave of gratitude. She didn't really expect any help from him, but somehow his presence was reassuring. He still believed. She was beginning to expect everyone to drop away like leaves from a dead tree.

Terry was juggling with eggs at the kitchen stove. "Mr. Beaumont slept outside the house in his car all night," he said. "Gee, when I saw him there this morning I had to ask him in for breakfast, didn't I?"

"Of course. Mr. Beaumont, there was no need—"

"I'm a collector of old rocks and primitive art work," he said drily.

"Sit down, Mom. I'll bring your coffee," Terry said.

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She sat down, a little dazed, across the table from Beaumont.

"Before you have a chance to think any more," he said, "let me read your mind. The good doctor got to you. No friends. Miss Wilson gone, colleagues gone, the principal gone, the Judge gone, the doctor gone. The town ready to protect six families rather than one. No one on your side but a broken-down ham actor. Well, am I right?"

She tried a smile. "Amazing, my dear Holmes," she said.

"I've been thinking, too," he said, a frown creasing his forehead. "So we fight. We demand a hearing. There are delays. Witnesses hesitate to come forward. Each filthy, lying story is finally aired. Some of the witnesses will actually believe them. Having been persuaded you're a Circe they will have interpreted perfectly innocent things to your discredit. Everyone will be smeared. Weeks will pass. Finally you'll be cleared—but you'll be finished here forever."

She nodded slowly. "So you've come around to it, too."

"Like hell!" he said, putting down his cup with a clatter. "I just mean the normal procedure gets nobody anywhere. You've got to be acquitted quickly, and without a shadow of doubt. Mr. Anonymous has to be exposed. His association with Mangan has to be exposed."

"Association with Mangan—?"

"When did you get clobbered with this thing, Jane? After you handed in a report on Mangan. That report's in Mr. Danning's office safe now, discredited. Mangan is a bully and a strong-arm boy. But he runs with a pack, and animals who run in packs are notorious cowards. He hasn't the kind of brains to initiate this sort of thing. I'll bet my life on it. Someone showed him the way. Mr. Anonymous. If we could prove this—fast, quick, and clean—if we can force him into the open to help Mangan, who could, of course, expose him—"

"But how?"

"It calls for the unorthodox. If we lose, then you've got no chance left. What do you say?"

"There is no way to win," she said.

"You can resign and leave town," he said.

"Perhaps, in spite of the way I feel, that is the only—"

"No, Mom!" Terry said. He had come over to her, linked his arm in hers. "Dad would have fought it, wouldn't he, Mom?"

"I don't know," she said.

Beaumont spoke gently. "Your husband has some family here, I understand. Perhaps they—"

"I called them when I got home last night," she said. "Bill's aunt and uncle. They've left town unexpectedly on a motor trip." There was an edge of bitterness in her voice.

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"Leaving the sinking ship?" Beaumont asked.

She made a gesture of helplessness. "I see everything in this framework, Mr. Beaumont. Perhaps they hadn't heard—"

"Perhaps." He pushed back his chair and stood up. "I have your permission to raise a little hell?"

"Yes, Mom!" Terry pleaded.

She nodded. Beaumont went to the door, then turned, grinning. "You and Terry are to stay put here. And if you hear of any violence, mobs or motorcycle goons—just take it easy. I was a Marine commando in the war." He laughed, almost happily. "I'm a reasonably tough cookie and I haven't a blessed thing in the world to lose." The smile vanished. "Except the only two friends I've made in a long time." And he was gone.

The Mangans were an unhappy family. Fred Mangan was a big strapping man, a carpenter who worked for a local contractor. He had stopped loving his wife long ago. His only son had grown up out of control. The whole family lived in a kind of silent enmity.

On this morning they sat at the kitchen table finishing breakfast. Mangan's juices were bitter. His wife had asked for money he didn't have to give her. The boy had come in too late again, probably raising cain somewhere. The coffee was cold and tasteless. He looked up as he heard brisk footsteps on the back porch. Someone knocked.

"See who it is," Mangan growled at his son.

Pat Mangan stood up. He was as tall as his father, over six feet. He was a hundred and eighty pounds of solid bone and muscle. He shuffled over to the door. A handsome man, about Pat's height but thirty pounds lighter, stood outside the door, smiling. He stood sideways, balanced on the balls of his feet. Pat guessed it was one of the rich summer folks who wanted his father to do some work. The clothes seemed to tell him that.

"Are you Pat Mangan?" the man asked.

"Yeah."

That was all the conversation. A lightening left hand bored deep into Pat's stomach, and as his head jerked forward a vicious right cross landed squarely on his chin. Pat Mangan went down like a sack of potatoes. Mrs. Mangan screamed as she jumped up from the table.

The man stood over Pat, still smiling. "Every time I see you from now on, Mangan, I'm going to flatten you. I'm going to bounce you around this town like a rubber ball. That's fair warning. I think perhaps you'd better go to the police and swear out a charge against me if you want to save yourself. Of course then I would have to explain why." He turned to the elder Mangans who stood stunned by the kitchen table. He smiled and bowed.

"Good morning," he said. . . .

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Doris Wilson always arrived at her job early. Mr. Danning never wanted her until after assembly which took place at nine sharp, but she liked to be ready for the day's work. Sometimes someone would drop in for a little gossip, and this morning—well, the whole school was buzzing about Jane.

She was just putting her desk in order when the door opened and a man came in. He was a very handsome man in a tweed jacket and slacks, with a bright scarf at his throat. His hair was golden, close-cropped.

"Miss Doris Wilson?" he asked politely.

"Yes," she said, beaming at him.

He turned, and her blood ran cold. She sat down abruptly, staring at the scarred half of his face. His smile had turned bitter. He stepped toward her desk and she saw that he was holding a small bunch of wild flowers. He put them in the empty glass vase in front of her. "A present," he said, "from me to you. To freshen the air after I leave." Then he walked straight past her into Paul Danning's office.

Danning was seated at his desk and he looked up in some surprise at the unannounced visitor. To Danning's credit it must be said he didn't bat an eyelash at the sight of Beaumont's face.

"Mr. Danning?"

"Yes. You're John Beaumont, aren't you?" Danning said. "I ran into Dr. Grant having breakfast at the Inn. He told me about Jane. How is she?"

"Just about as you'd expect, Mr. Danning."

"I was talking about the accident."

"I don't know of any accident," Beaumont said. "Everything that's happened to Jane so far seems to me to be far from accidental. Do you have a copy of that anonymous letter? I'd like to see it."

"I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to show it to you," Danning said.

"No matter. As long as you have it. Keep it safe, Danning. If anything should happen to the original we'd never have it exactly. Is there a transcript of yesterday's Board meeting?"

"Not a transcript," Danning said. "The secretary took notes."

"Miss Wilson? Nice unbiased notes, I imagine. Tell me, Danning, just how did Mangan present his testimony? Did he tell his story in his own words?"

Danning's eyes narrowed. "I don't think I follow you. He answered questions the chairman put to him."

"You do follow me," Beaumont said. "Mangan had told his story to Judge Daley before the meeting. The Judge then did the questioning here. Right?"

"Right. Properly so, I think. He kept the testimony to Mangan's own story, so that no one else was mentioned. He explained his purpose to the Board in advance and

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they approved. He said he didn't want to—I think the phrase he used was—'open a can of peas.'"

Beaumont nodded. "Would you mind coming over to the window, Mr. Danning."

Danning joined Beaumont at a window looking down over the play yard. Several hundred young people were milling around waiting for the assembly bell. At the far side of the yard Pat Mangan stood, surrounded by half a dozen younger boys.

"Suppose I was to go up to Mangan out there and knock him flat," Beaumont said.

"I'd advise against trying," Danning said. "He's a very tough customer."

"Thanks for your concern," Beaumont said. "But what would your duty be?"

"I'd call the State troopers and have you arrested," Danning said.

"That's your responsibility?"

"Technically it's the responsibility of the Board. I would normally act for them."

Beaumont, his eyes very bright, faced the principal. "But this is a rather unusual situation, Mr. Danning. The 'Jane situation,' I mean. Touchy. No? Before calling the Troopers you might better consult with the chairman and let him take the responsibility. No?"

"It would not be too illogical," Danning said, his face deadpan.

"Play it that way—if you were honest about believing in Jane." Beaumont's smile widened. "I recommend staying by the window, Mr. Danning. You'll have a box seat!"

Two minutes later John Beaumont crossed the school yard toward Mangan. At the sight of him children gave ground, so that he walked up a steadily widening alley to where Mangan and his six young friends idled by the fence. Mangan saw him coming and it was clear the others had heard of the earlier encounter. Beaumont stopped a few feet from Mangan.

"I warned you what would happen every time I saw you," he said.

"Yeah," Mangan said. "You warned me *after* you socked me. Well, this is a little different, wise guy!"

"All of you—or just you?" Beaumont asked pleasantly.

"I don't need any help," Mangan said, and rushed.

Beaumont moved like a ballet dancer. His hands were fast, ripping, slashing, jabbing, and then, suddenly, with Mangan groping for him, he let loose a one-two to Mangan's jaw that popped like pistol shots. Mangan fell straight forward on his face and lay there. Beaumont looked around at the younger boys. They were suddenly frightened children, and he felt sorry for them.

One of them backed away, crying, "You didn't give him a chance!"

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"You'll pardon the ham in me, boys, but I feel impelled to quote from Richard the Third." Beaumont gave them a grim smile. "'Gentlemen, I am not in a giving vein today.'"

He walked back down the alley made by the staring students and disappeared around the corner of the building. At an upper window Paul Danning had a tight-lipped smile on his face. He crossed to his desk, picked up his phone, and dialed the number of Judge Daley's office.

Judge Daley was also smiling as Beaumont was ushered into his office. He came around his desk, wiping his hands on a linen handkerchief.

"This is a pleasure," he said. "I've been meaning to drop in to pay my respects one of these days, but folks sort of have the idea you aren't too socially inclined as yet."

"Folks are right," Beaumont said in a low flat voice.

"Well! It's understandable. Tough luck—your accident." He looked at Beaumont's face with frank curiosity. "I should have thought you'd try plastic surgery."

"Nothing to graft to as yet," Beaumont said.

"Well. Everything worthwhile takes time, I always say. Come in. You've saved me the trouble of trying to find you." The Judge chuckled. "Understand you stirred up a little commotion at the school a while back. Danning phoned me. Conscientious fellow. Sit down, Mr. Beaumont, sit down."

"You've sent for the State Troopers, I take it?"

"What? No, no." The Judge walked around and sat in his squeaking swivel chair, his hands folded on his plump stomach. "I'm old-fashioned, Mr. Beaumont. Spare the rod and spoil the child still seems like a pretty sound philosophy to me. I know about last night, you see. Talked to Doc Grant."

"Doc Grant seems to get around," Beaumont said drily.

"He does. Thought he ought to tell me since you seemed personally interested in Jane Wardman's case." The blue eyes narrowed. "Known her long?"

"Never laid eyes on her until she was projected onto my property last night by those homicidal kids."

"No charges made against them, I understand?" The Judge cocked his head to one side.

"No. Mrs. Wardman couldn't make a positive identification. And if she could it would be pretty senseless—thanks to you!"

"Now hold your horses, Mr. Beaumont. Vehicular homicide is something quite apart from the rest of this business. Quite apart. That's why I haven't called the troopers—and won't unless I'm forced to. Young Mangan's had a good walloping coming to him for quite a while, only nobody has had

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the guts. Unofficially, you understand, I congratulate you. Unless he or his parents raise a holler I don't intend to do anything about it. And I doubt if they will. That picture window of yours must be worth two or three hundred dollars."

"You seem to move pretty consistently outside the law, Judge Daley," Beaumont said. "Star chamber hearings. Winking at criminal assault."

"You want to be arrested?" the Judge asked, laughing.

"That's the general idea," Beaumont said.

The Judge's eyes popped open. "I don't get it," he said.

"I want something on the record," Beaumont said. "There's no record of your board meeting which condemned Jane Wardman. The evidence, if any, is in your desk drawer. The report Jane made on Mangan has been tabled. There's nothing but rumor—ugly rumor. I want to get something on the record, Judge Daley. If I'm arrested for beating up the Mangan boy I'll state my reasons to the court. Maybe, then, you'll have to play this thing in the open. The first thing I'll do, if I am arrested in this town, is to demand that you disqualify yourself as judge at any preliminary hearing. You've got too much covered up about this Mangan boy as it is."

The smile had frozen on Judge Daley's face and slowly disappeared. "You're not playing this very smart, Beaumont. You're not helping Jane. It won't help her at all to have all this forced into the open."

"What have you done to trace the author of that anonymous letter?" Beaumont asked.

"Nothing," the Judge said calmly.

"Why not?"

"Because it's hopeless. Plain paper. Stamped envelope. Mailed in the night box at the local post office. Handwritten, with the handwriting obviously disguised. Not a chance of tracing it."

Beaumont changed his tack. "You had a private session with Mangan before you took him to the board meeting. He told you a lot of things you didn't present to the other members. You kept part of his testimony from the Board."

"That's right," the Judge said, still calm. "He named a lot of names and did a lot of wild talking about other people. Hearsay. I kept that out. I only let him testify about himself. I'd do the same thing in a court proceeding. If I didn't I'd be swamped with objections and there'd be a mistrial. Any other complaints, Mr. Beaumont?"

"Will you let me see the original anonymous letter?"

"No," the Judge said, promptly. "That's impounded evidence in case of a possible court procedure."

"Would you authorize me to see the copy of it that Danning has?"

The Judge hesitated. Then his

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smile returned, a little forced. "Technically speaking you're not entitled to see it," he said. "It was presented at a closed-door hearing. But since you feel there's some kind of skullduggery going on I'm inclined to say 'yes.'"

"What are you going to do about my public attack on Mangan?"

The Judge's grin widened. "Nothing—unless he or his parents bring a charge against you, or I'm pressured by other members of the board. Personally I don't plan to do a blessed thing, Mr. Beaumont. I think the boy had it coming to him."

Beaumont was scowling as he came out of Judge Daley's office and went toward his parked car. The Judge was so sure, so correct, in his answers. It was the kind of blank wall Jane was going to face, wherever she turned, unless he could reach the answer he was looking for.

Beaumont had just walked around to the far side of his convertible and was opening the driver's door when a man's voice called to him. He turned and was astonished to see Pat Mangan's father coming toward him. He smiled to himself. Well, if it was going to be a family feud—

"You want me?" he asked.

Mr. Mangan showed no signs of belligerence. "I wanted to talk to you, Mr. Beaumont," he said. "I don't know what you've got it in for Pat for. I figure he probably has it comin' to him. He's a cross for his mother and me to bear. One thing after another."

"What do you want of me?" Beaumont asked, coldly.

"He came home—after what happened at school this morning. So we took some good advice, Mr. Beaumont. My brother has a farm up in the northern part of the State. I'm sending Pat up there. I wanted you to know, because I figured you might be coming after him up to the house again. His mother couldn't stand it. She's all broke up."

"When are you sending him?"

"Already took him to the depot," Mr. Mangan said. "Train leaves in about twenty minutes. So, as long as you know that, if you wouldn't come looking for him at the house his mother and I—"

"Pardon me!" Beaumont said. "I've got to talk to him before he leaves." He jumped into his car and it pulled away from the curb with a screech of rubber.

The railroad station was only a couple of minutes' drive from Daley's office. As Beaumont pulled up at the platform and sprang out of his car, he saw Pat Mangan sitting on a baggage truck, an old suitcase resting beside him. Mangan saw Beaumont as he came down the platform. He jumped down from the truck and looked around, as if contemplating flight. Then he bolted into the station.

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Beaumont followed. There was no one in the waiting room. Beaumont pushed open the door of the men's washroom and went in. Mangan stood facing him, backed up against the wash basin. His teeth were bared and he was partly crouched, waiting. There was a knife with a wicked-looking short blade in his right hand.

"You shouldn't have come in here, Beaumont," he said. "There isn't room in here for your dance act."

He rushed, his knife arm drawn back. Beaumont's left arm shot out to check the knife thrust, his right foot moved forward, and his right hand caught the front of Mangan's jacket. In the next instant all one hundred and eighty pounds of Pat Mangan was hurtling over Beaumont's shoulder to crash with sickening force against the brick wall of the room. He tumbled to the floor and lay still. Beaumont squatted down beside him for a moment. Then he straightened up, got a paper cup from a container on the wall, and filled it with water. He threw the water in Mangan's face.

"Come on, buster," he said. "You and I have got some talking to do." Then as Mangan groaned, Beaumont bent closer. "Who advised you to leave town? *Who?* Or do I bounce you around some more?"

Back on Elm Street, Terry Wardman came running from the front of the house to the kitchen where Jane was belatedly cleaning up the breakfast dishes.

"Mom!" The boy looked frightened. "There's people coming—a lot of people! There's eight or ten cars."

It was true. They came, like a funeral cortége, one behind the other. They got out at the foot of the path, perhaps twenty women and half a dozen men. When they were all assembled they came up the path in a body. Jane was at the front door to greet them. She recognized the first woman as Mrs. Slater, the president of the PTA. Mrs. Slater gave her a stony look.

"We want to talk to you, Mrs. Wardman," she said, and immediately brushed past Jane into the small living room. The others crowded in behind her. Jane, feeling sick at her stomach, stayed by the door, her arm around Terry.

"I seem to have no choice but to receive you, Mrs. Slater," she said.

"I'll be as brief as possible," Mrs. Slater said. "We don't know what action the Board of Education intends to take in your case, Mrs. Wardman, but we don't intend to wait to find out. We are the parents of children in this town. We want you to leave—now—today. If you should refuse, we are prepared to force you to leave. Mrs. Mangan is too ill to be here, but we have persuaded her to bring a morals charge against you if necessary. If she does, we believe the courts will find

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you unfit to keep the custody of your own child."

Jane fought to keep her voice steady. "Even if I chose to submit to this threat, Mrs. Slater, it will take some time for Terry and me to make our plans."

"Today!" Mrs. Slater said. "Your uncle and aunt can pack your belongings for you later. We don't want you in this town. We don't want our children passing this house and seeing you here."

Other people seemed to be crowding in the front door behind Jane. She wanted to scream, to run —but there was no escape. She clung to Terry, trembling from head to foot. Suddenly a strong arm went around her. She looked up and saw that it was Paul Danning, white-faced and angry.

"I got here as quickly as I could," he said. "I just heard of this gathering." He turned on the crowd of bleak faces. "What kind of people are you?" he demanded. "Nothing has been proved against Mrs. Wardman. She hasn't even had a hearing. Aren't you prepared to give her the simplest kind of justice?"

Jane looked at them. They weren't. She could see the same thought in all the women's faces: *Maybe my husband was one of them!*

"Perhaps you'd better consider your own position, Mr. Danning," the PTA president said.

"I have considered it!" Danning almost shouted. "I've let the Board handle things their way without protesting. I'm sorry now that I did. This lynching party I simply won't allow. I don't care if it costs me my job, Mrs. Slater, so don't threaten me with that. Someone has to demand fair play and decency."

Mrs. Slater didn't answer. Something behind Danning held her in a kind of horrified fascination. The others were staring too. John Beaumont had come into the room. He stood for a minute looking at the gathering as if they were circus freaks. Then he turned to Jane and put both hands on her shoulders.

"It's all over, my dear," he said very gently. "Done. Finished. Settled." He looked down at Terry and patted his shoulder. "No more worries."

Then he turned and faced the delegation. "I shall endeavor," he said drily, "to talk to you as though you were human beings. You've all known Mrs. Wardman for a number of years. I've known her for less than twenty-four hours, but I know her far better than you do. I was outraged by what had happened to her, and since no one else seemed interested in helping her, I decided to take a hand. I am a resident of your community—in case you didn't know. This kind of charge against an innocent person—and I knew Mrs. Wardman was innocent, perhaps because I

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wasn't as eager as her friends were to think her guilty—this kind of charge comes from an off-balance person, and usually for reasons of revenge. Pat Mangan was an obvious possibility. Mrs. Wardman had made a report on him which, if acted on, might have even sent him to prison. But this seemed all a little too subtle for his kind of mind, I thought. Oh, he could throw stones, and yell dirty words, and indulge in his limited artistic talents—but the rest of it was too subtle, too calculated, for him to manage. It seemed clear to me, therefore, that someone had made use of the report on Mangan to persuade him to invent his little story of immoralities. If I was right we didn't have too wide a search to make. Not too many people had had access to that report. Mr. Danning, his secretary Miss Wilson, the members of the Board of Education. It hadn't been acted on, it hadn't been made public. So I had a clear picture—some mentally twisted man who was getting a lascivious pleasure out of stripping Mrs. Wardman in public. I had him pinpointed pretty quickly. The man who could control the situation. The man who could prime the witness in return for tabling Jane's report. The man who allegedly received the anonymous letters. A man who couldn't or wouldn't act against me when I beat up a student on the school grounds because that student could expose him. Well, he has been exposed. Pat Mangan is making a detailed statement to the State Police at this moment."

"Judge Daley!" Jane whispered.

"It seemed so logical," Beaumont said. "He was in the saddle, controlling the whole thing. Pretending to be a friend." He turned to Jane. "Only I was dead wrong. Judge Daley *is* your friend—and a good one. He handled this, I've come to believe, the only way he could. I dare say he's been working on his own to get to the bottom of it. A good guy, the Judge."

"Thank you," said a voice from the doorway. Jane turned and saw the Judge standing there, his face stern but reassuring.

"I overlooked the one obvious fact until it was almost too late," Beaumont said. "A rejection. There was only one rejection in the carload! A rejection the victim refused to accept. What a plan! To drag Jane down into the mud, to play the hero, and to make her so grateful she would finally give herself to him. Good old, kindly old Mr. Danning—the noble principal, the protector of fair play and justice and decency. God save us!" He shot a look at the white-faced Danning who seemed to be paralyzed where he stood. "She wouldn't marry him, but he found a way. When she gave him her report on Mangan he found a way to persuade that dull-witted delinquent that she actually hated him, had

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actually been interested in him. Fed by our charming friend here, Mangan thrived on it, and saw his way out of trouble. Then our hero wrote the anonymous letters, naming God knows who—perhaps your husband, Madam President! Fortunately Judge Daley kept this to himself, waiting to see how the cat would jump. And who was scared into exposing himself when I began to take a hand? Why, our hero! He persuaded the Mangans, with a quick telephone call, to ship their prodigal son out of town. He couldn't explain *his* interest in the disappearing act, so Mr. Mangan, a simple soul, spilled the beans to me and I was able to catch up with young Mangan before he disappeared into the blue. Now came our hero's grandstand play. He would defend Mrs. Wardman before this august body. He would even lose his job for her sake. Could she say 'No' to him after that?"

Beaumont whirled on Danning again. "There are two troopers waiting outside, my sanctimonious friend. You better go out to them or I'm apt to do a job on you here and now that you won't forget." Then he turned back to the astonished crowd. "The rest of you get out of here! And never mind sniveling about how sorry you are. None of you is half as sorry as you ought to be. If I had my way—" He turned away, shaking with anger.

Slowly, silently they left. Jane, fighting tears, was holding Terry close to her. Finally only Beaumont and the Judge were left.

"Beat it out of him, did you?" the Judge asked placidly.

"I persuaded him," Beaumont said. "There's only one language he understands. Fortunately I could speak it."

The Judge chuckled. "I knew you were pointing the finger at me this morning," he said. "I wondered how it was going to come out." He went over to Jane and put his hand on her shoulder. "You've got a few friends, honey—good ones. Now, I'm calling a special assembly at the school right after lunch. I want you there, while I deliver a few well-chosen words."

"I'll be going," Beaumont said.

"Please!" Jane said. "You've got to give me the chance to—"

"I had fun," he said wryly. "I'm grateful to you. For the first time in nearly two years I—I came out of hiding."

"Please don't go," she said.

"Please, Mr. Beaumont!" Terry said.

Beaumont gave Jane a searching look. "Because I helped doesn't mean you have to—"

"I know. I know, John."

Beaumont looked at her steadily for a moment. Then he let his breath out in a long sigh. He grinned at Terry. "How's for a fresh pot of coffee, chef?"

"Coming up!" the boy said happily.

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